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Amrita Kalasha

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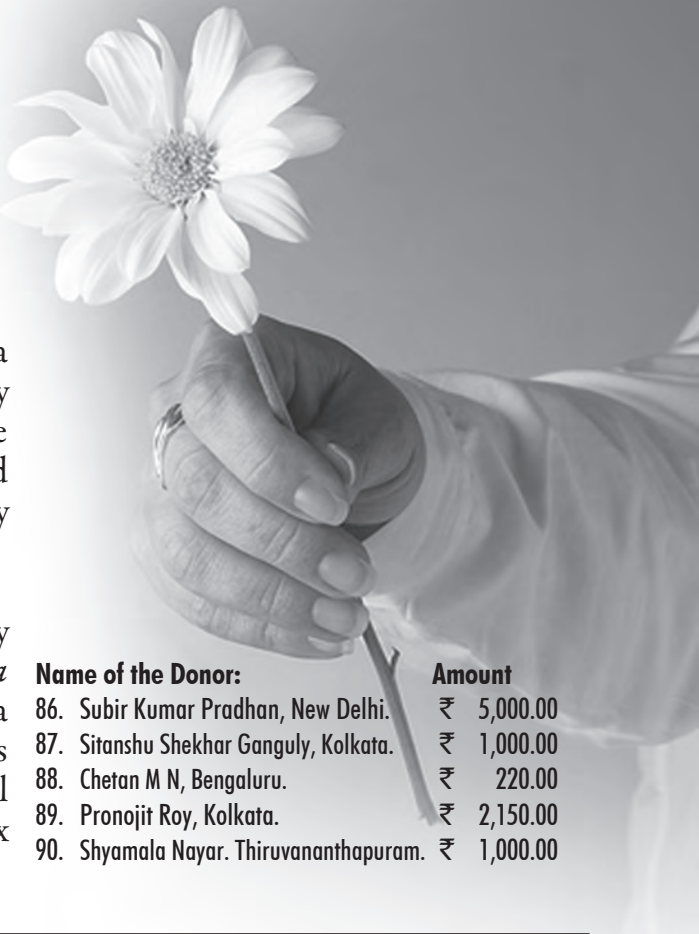
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VIVEKANANDA—A BORN LEADER
by Asim Chaudhuri

The profile of Vivekananda as "A Leader" had previously never been studied and thought about on its own, especially in the light of modern management and leadership theories. The author shows that Vivekananda preached and practised the sublime concept of servant-leadership in his life and within his organization eighty years before it was introduced to the corporate world and was accepted as the most singular and powerful statement of leadership concept in modern times.

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Traditional Wisdom

Attaining Liberation Here

यतो निर्विषयस्यास्य मनसो मुक्तिरिष्यते ।
अतो निर्विषयं नित्यं मनः कार्यं मुमुक्षुणा ।

Since liberation is predicated of the mind devoid of desire for sense-objects, therefore, the mind should always be made free of such desire by the seeker after liberation.

(*Amritabindu Upanishad*, 3)

यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।
अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥

When all the desires clinging to one's heart fall off, then a mortal becomes immortal (and) attains Brahman here.

(*Katha Upanishad*, 2.3.14)

तदेष श्लोको भवति ।
तदेव सक्तः सह कर्मणैति लिङ्गं मनो यत्र निषक्तमस्य ।
प्राप्यान्तं कर्मणस्तस्य यत्किंचेह करोत्ययम् ।
तस्माल्लोकात्पुनरैत्यस्मै लोकाय कर्मणे ॥
इति नु कामयमानः अथाकामयमानः योऽकामो निष्काम आप्तकाम आत्मकामो न तस्य प्राणा उत्क्रामन्ति ब्रह्मैव सन्ब्रह्माप्येति ॥

Regarding this there is a verse: 'Being attached he, together with the work, attains that result to which his subtle body or mind is attached. Exhausting the results of whatever work he did in this life, he returns from that world to this for (fresh) work.' Thus the man who desires. But the man who does not desire (never transmigrates). Of him who is without desires, who is free from desires, the objects of whose desire have been attained, and to whom all objects of desire are but the Atman—the organs do not depart. Being but Brahman, he is merged in Brahman.

(*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 4.4.6)

THIS MONTH

All human quest is in the final analysis a quest for Reality, but different conceptions give rise to confusion and conflicts regarding the word 'real'. **Eschewing Terra Incognita** proposes a path to terra firma.

Sri Krishna has dominated the religious consciousness of India for centuries. In **Sri Krishna: Ideal Grihastha or Ideal Sannyasin?** Swami Durgananda of Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, portrays Sri Krishna's perfect detachment both as householder and as renunciant.

The Story of Shyampukur Bati is a saga of dedication by a group of devotees—one of them a great grandson of Mahendranath Gupta or M—in taking care of the house in which Sri Ramakrishna stayed in Calcutta. This sagacious story is told by Swami Narasimhananda of Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata.

Every society is awash with rumours of all kinds. This phenomenon, inherent in the human mind and society, is succinctly analysed by Brahmachari Isharupachaitanya of Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, in **Rumour: An Irresistible Phenomenon**.

Olive Wings is the real story of a brave woman who was inspired by Swami Vivekananda's stirring words. The story is narrated by Dr Alpana Ghosh, former Head, Department of Chemistry, Ranchi Women's College.

Sri Ramakrishna is the culmination of five thousand years of Indian spiritual life and a living commentary on the scriptures. While revitalizing all spiritual paths Sri Ramakrishna integrated them all in him. Swami Bhajanananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, surveys these aspects in the second part of **Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – II**.

In the concluding part of **Indian Peafowl in Sanskrit Literature and Tradition** Dr Suruchi Pande of ELA Foundation, Pune, paraphrases a Khasi folk tale that shows how the peafowl got its bright colours and its presence in popular culture, mythology, and conservation.

Swami Vivekananda wanted an all-round human development with education as the fulcrum and freedom as the watchword. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee, former professor of statistics, Calcutta University, proposes an alternate index to measure human development in the concluding part of **Human Development: Translating Vivekananda's Ideas into Numbers**.

Eschewing Terra Incognita

Down the ages disagreements between materialists, realists, positivists on one side and subjectivists, absolutists, and transcendental idealists on the other have been strong. What is real, abstract or concrete, mind and spirit or matter? The discussion whether universalism or nominalism is the true view also joined the fray. Again, philosophies that spoke of everything as dependent were countered by other philosophers saying that everything is independent. These ontological squabbles from the epistemological to the eschatological have been intense and at times ludicrous. To a greater or lesser degree these squabbles occurred everywhere. India—with its philosophic, religious, and spiritual inclination—had all possible shades of idealists, yet they were not amused by the Charvakas, Indian materialists, who rejected idealism as pernicious and preached unbridled enjoyments to one and all. This 'popular philosophy' naturally had a very large following. The world is still divided as persons gravitate towards either side depending on their mental evolution. Materialists and realists were always more populous and vociferous, for a common person struggling for survival and enduring hardships cannot disbelieve the tangible, the worldly, and the physical. These misconceptions are of paramount importance today, given the growing tendency to denigrate the other side as a figment of imagination and verbal delusion.

Literature of all types, covertly or overtly, fans these flames of discord the world over. But there is no peace even among persons of the same camp, for they are hopelessly divided having their own proponents advocating something and opponents discarding it. However, speaking of two camps is a bit graphic; though the actual world is divided, it works like an existential see-saw. The camps are see-sawing; both are partially right. The world is material and ideal, dependent and independent, nominal and universal, but where this line meets is disputable. Moreover, the line thought to be static is not so, it is dynamic and keeps shifting.

In today's world if a hard core realist dismisses idealism, such a person has missed much in life. Similarly is the case with an idealist who rebuffs matter. Is the tsunami that surged on Japan's coasts real? Better still, is the pain on being pinched unreal? On the other side, is the colour seen in objects real? Why does one even speak of beauty and mind? It is true that there have been absolutist philosophers who have tried to work at a synthesis. But one thing comes to us with full force: relativity. This world is relative, whether one calls it ideal, real, material, dependent, or independent. Thus, the relative world—more appropriately the universe—is the basis of all our squabbles.

On another plane it is squabbling about what is life. For the last few centuries conceptions of the universe and life have constantly changed, and some persons and religions holding archaic views are ridiculed. Yet, where everything is relative we glibly use absolute terms like space-time, antimatter, dark energy, and so forth on the large scale. On the small scale we speak of consciousness, intuition, mental evolution, and so on.

Apart from the fact of relativity another certainty is that of uncertainty, the tangible and the intangible, both working on the micro and the macro levels. Take space, which was thought inactive and flat, or time, once considered to be unidirectional and now found to be dynamic, curved, and circular. Life thrives in three dimensions, but the unperceived space-time makes and remakes the former. To connect the large with the (very) small scientists are talking of 'supersymmetry' to unify all known forces. The M-theory, however, posits eleven dimensions. And we thought the world and life is simple! What is real or ideal, dependent or independent? What is matter but vibration or energy? Mind can and does act on this so called 'matter', and that is why consciousness is increasingly being brought into every scientific equation and experiment.

Time-space dimension—or entity—is joined to another important factor called causation. This is the other thing that hits us with full force, besides relativity and the feeling of living amidst the tangible and the intangible. This is embedded in humans. Everything we know has to have a cause, and the effect becomes a cause in turn. *Desha-kala-nimitta*, time-space-causation, Swami Vivekananda says, 'have no independent existence. They have not even the existence which the chair or the wall has. They are as shadows around everything which you cannot catch. They have no real existence; yet they are not non-existent, seeing that through them all things are manifesting as this universe.'

Desha-kala-nimitta is not disparate; it is the most ubiquitous and obvious thing referred and implied in everything we do. These real-unreal shadows denoted by words and concepts as well as its derivatives and cognates surround, permeate, and are immanent in everything; yet they have no boundaries. The immensity of the implication is lost to us, and we fail to understand and describe

it correctly. What we are, have, do, think, know, dream, talk, imagine, is under the sway of *desha-kala-nimitta*. In short, everything that exists, sentient and insentient, matter and mind, from the large to the small is under its sway, its laws. These laws also include our mind and consciousness, for there is always a tendency to believe that one is separate from this realism and idealism. Whatever is under law is bound, and this includes the so-called free-will. Swamiji says: 'These changes are caused by Desha, Kala and Nimitta (space, time and causation), or, according to a higher psychological generalisation, by Nama and Rupa (name and form). It is by name and form that one thing is differentiated from another.'

Swamiji says: 'This universe is only a part of infinite existence, thrown into a peculiar mould, composed of space, time, and causation.' *Desha-kala-nimitta* or *nama-rupa*, called maya in Vedanta, does not really limit the infinite or absolute Existence. The rope does not change into a snake, though it appears as a snake due to ignorance. We had been mistakenly see-sawing on the apparent world of idealism and realism and had been squabbling over its reality. If we can step down, we will be able to see that its fixed support is Atman-Brahman. This fixed support, the centre of the universe, is amazingly present in the core of one's own being. As Bhagavan in the Bhagavadgita says: 'O Arjuna, Ishvara resides in the region of the heart of all creatures, revolving through maya all the creatures (as though) mounted on a machine!' This state beyond maya is described and attained in the words of the *Katha Upanishad*: 'The Atman, which is subtler than the subtle and greater than the great, is lodged in the heart of (every) creature. A desireless man sees that glory of the Atman through the serenity of the organs (such as the mind and senses) and (thereby becomes) free from sorrow.' And also from all bickering.　　🙏 PB

Sri Krishna: Ideal Grihastha or Ideal Sannyasin?

Swami Durgananda

ANY MENTION OF SRI KRISHNA invariably reminds one of the Bhagavadgita. This sacred scripture is one of the pillars of Hinduism, it has supported and inspired Hindus for thousands of years and will continue to do so as long as humanity seeks to understand spirituality and become divine. There could not have been a more incongruous place to speak these highest truths than a battlefield, where everyone is keyed to fever pitch with killer instincts and military discipline. It was possible only for Sri Krishna to calmly and mellifluously speak on the various yogas amidst the din of an imminent war. As his teachings are vast and appropriate for every person and situation, Sri Krishna has become a focal point of Indian culture and ethos.

Sri Krishna is a most fascinating and enigmatic person. In him one sees sporting together diametrically opposing virtues: mysticism and statesmanship, tenderness and valour, meditation and activity, intelligence and physical strength, gaiety and deep seriousness, philosophy and love. Sri Krishna loved all, yet punished the wicked and transgressors. He was married and at the same time he was a yogi of the highest calibre. The question then arises: was Sri Krishna an ideal grihastha, married person, or an ideal sannyasin, monk? Before examining this question the qualities of an ideal grihastha as well as that of an ideal sannyasin must be recalled, keeping in mind that as the word 'ideal' occurs in both the cases it demands special attention.

Ideal Grihastha and Ideal Sannyasin

An ideal grihastha is almost like an ideal sannyasin. In fact, most values are common to both. These higher values are not mutually exclusive airtight compartments, contrasting and conflicting, or antagonistic to each other. An ideal grihastha must possess the detachment of a sannyasin, and an ideal sannyasin must fulfil the obligations towards all beings like the grihastha. Of course, there are a few fundamental differences.

In his *Karma Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda quotes a few passages from the *Mahanirvana Tantra*:

The householder should be devoted to God; the knowledge of God should be his goal of life. Yet he must work constantly, perform all his duties; he must give up the fruits of his actions to God.[1] …

Knowing that mother and father are the visible representatives of God, the householder, always and by all means, must please them. …

Before parents one must not utter jokes, must not show restlessness, must not show anger or temper. …

If the householder has food and drink and clothes without first seeing that his mother and his father, his children, his wife, and the poor, are supplied, he is committing a sin. The mother and the father are the causes of this body; so a man must undergo a thousand troubles in order to do good to them.

Even so is his duty to his wife. No man should scold his wife, and he must always maintain her as if she were his own mother. And even when he is in the greatest difficulties and

troubles, he must not show anger to his wife.

He who thinks of another woman besides his wife, if he touches her even with his mind—that man goes to dark hell (43).

The householder must be pure in heart and clean in body, always active and always ready for work.

To his enemies the householder must be a hero. Them he must resist. That is the duty of the householder. He must not sit down in a corner and weep, and talk nonsense about non-resistance. If he does not show himself a hero to his enemies he has not done his duty. And to his friends and relatives he must be as gentle as a lamb.

It is the duty of the householder not to pay reverence to the wicked; because, if he reverences the wicked people of the world, he patronises wickedness. …

These three things he must not talk of. He must not talk in public of his own fame; he must not preach his own name or his own powers; he must not talk of his wealth, or of anything that has been told to him privately (44–5).

The householder is the centre of life and society. It is a worship for him to acquire and spend wealth nobly. …

He must struggle to acquire a good name by all means. He must not gamble, he must not move in the company of the wicked, he must not tell lies, and must not be the cause of trouble to others (46).

In the introduction to his translation of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Nikhilananda writes:

For the householders Sri Ramakrishna did not prescribe the hard path of total renunciation. He wanted them to discharge their obligations to their families. Their renunciation was to be mental. Spiritual life could not be acquired by flying away from responsibilities. A married couple should live like brother and sister after one or two children, devoting their time to spiritual talk

and contemplation. He encouraged the householders, saying that their life was, in a way, easier than that of the monk, since it was more advantageous to fight the enemy from inside a fortress than in an open field. He insisted, however, on their repairing into solitude every now and then to strengthen their devotion and faith in God through prayer, japa, and meditation.

But to the young men destined to be monks he pointed out the steep path of renunciation, both external and internal. They must take the vow of absolute continence and eschew all thought of greed and lust. For them self-control is final, imperative, and absolute.[2]

On the eve of his departure to the West for the second time, Swami Vivekananda gave a brief address to the inmates of the Belur Math. The notes as recorded in the Belur Math Diary contain a matter of great importance. We find in it the key elements of an ideal sannyasin as envisioned by Swamiji. 'The Sannyasin is to love death.'[3] Note that Swamiji does not say that a sannyasin does not *fear* death, but that he is to *love* death. A sannyasin holds his life as a sacrifice. Elaborating on this central monastic idea Swamiji says: 'You nourish the body by eating. What good is there in doing that if you do not hold it as a sacrifice to the well-being of others? You nourish your minds by reading books. There is no good in doing that unless you hold it also as a sacrifice to the whole world' (ibid.). 'The true *man* is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman's heart' (3.448). Swamiji is demanding of a sannyasin the possession of the entire spectrum of virtues, which necessarily includes contrasting virtues. A similar demand is placed by Swamiji when he next says that a sannyasin 'must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment must be ready to go and cultivate these fields (Swamiji said, pointing to the meadows of the Math). You must be prepared to ex-

plain the difficult intricacies of the Shastras now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields in the market' (3.447).

We find in Swamiji's other talks more light on what an ideal sannyasin should be: 'earth's best and finest [and] freshest flowers should be laid upon the altar. The strong, the young, with sound intellect and sound body—they must struggle for the truth' (1.454). 'Only two things [are] necessary for them: they must not possess property and they must not marry' (3.517). 'Sannyasins might be at the door of one of the cottages of the poorest subjects, glad to get only a piece of bread. And he has to mix with all grades; now he sleeps with a poor man in his cottage; tomorrow [he] sleeps on the beautiful bed of a king' (ibid.). 'Duty is the curse of the Samsari (householder), not for the Sannyasin' (5.92). 'Buddha or Christ … they were Sannyasins, and therefore they "had no enemy and were friendly and compassionate towards all"' (5.454). Thus far are some of the qualities of an ideal sannyasin.

Now, if we are to compare the two ideals, we can again refer to Sri Ramakrishna's and Swamiji's words.

On 30 June 1884 Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani, one of the renowned Sanskrit scholars of his time and a pillar of orthodox Hinduism, met Sri Ramakrishna in the latter's room. Sri Ramakrishna said on that occasion:

There is a great deal of difference between the knowledge of a householder and that of an all-renouncing sannyasi. The householder's knowledge is like the light of a lamp, which illumines only the inside of a room. He cannot see anything, with the help of such knowledge, except his own body and his immediate family. But the knowledge of the all-renouncing monk is like the light of the sun. Through that light he can see both, inside and outside the room.[4]

One of Swamiji's sayings has a similar meaning: 'Never forget to say to yourself and to teach to your children, as the difference between a firefly and the blazing sun, between the infinite ocean and a little pond, between a mustard seed and the mountain of Meru, such is the difference between the householder and the Sannyasin!'[5]

The sannyasin has renounced and thus has no fear. An important difference then follows: the sannyasin should not resort to self-defence, while for the grihastha self-defence is necessary. It is for this reason that Swamiji wrote to Prof. John Henry Wright—after the latter had prompted Swamiji to defend himself against his accusers—the following: 'My kind friend … I do not care what they say—the Sannyasin must not have self-defence' (7.466). '"Ought one to seek an opportunity of death in defence of right, or ought one to take the lesson of the Gita and learn never to react?" the Swami was asked. "I am for no reaction", said the Swami, speaking slowly and with a long pause. Then he added "—for Sannyasins. Self-defence for the householder!"' (8.263).

Such is the comparison of the ideal grihastha and the ideal sannyasin. We shall now turn to Sri Krishna's life and examine which of the two ideals it resembles.
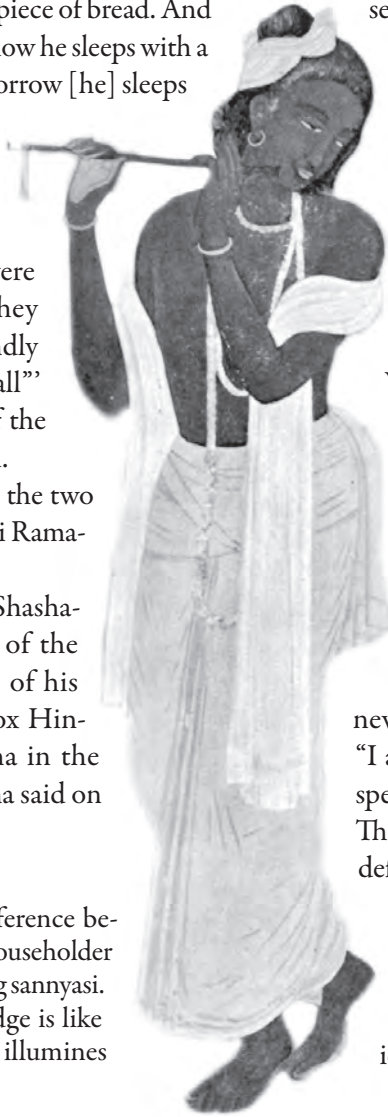
A Combination of both Ideals

Sri Krishna's is a rich and variegated personality. A prankish child, a cowherd boy, a friend, the beloved of the gopis, the master of skills, mentor, hero, warrior, king, statesman, diplomat, counsel, guru, sage, prophet, and above all an avatara. Though possessing all these qualities Sri Krishna was intensely human—he responded to every human emotion. When his poor friend Sudama went to meet him in Dwaraka, Sri Krishna gave him immense wealth. When he saw a lady with a deformity upon entering Kamsa's capital, he instantly cured her. He then calmly entered Kamsa's court and killed that unprincipled gargantuan man in a physical fight. Though possessing a tender heart Sri Krishna could exercise an adamantine will and terrific valour. Thus, we see in Sri Krishna a marvellous harmony of contrasting qualities. In him one discovers all through, as found in the epics and the Puranas, balance and harmony, never anything opposing and paradoxical. This is possible only if one's personality is vast. This is the sannyasa ideal.

Throughout his life Sri Krishna's sole concern was dharma—to uphold it, to protect and reassert its supremacy. He protected Draupadi's honour at the crucial moment in Duryodhana's assembly and sided with the Pandavas for dharma. He killed many evil persons for dharma's sake. He salvaged the Syamantaka jewel and returned it to Satrajit, for dharma. He released the captive sixteen thousand princesses from Narakasura's prison and married them all, lest they be thrown out on the street—a dharmic action. He reinstated Ugrasena on the throne of Mathura after killing Kamsa, and Sahadeva on the throne of Magadha, in the place of Jarasandha, again for dharma. He was interested in peace, but not at the cost of dharma. So much did he hold dharma supreme that the Kurukshetra War ensued even

with his good offices. One of the points to be noted here is that grihasthas are to perform their household duties without compromising dharma, as they 'fight from inside a fort'. Instead of staying at home Sri Krishna, with his family and friends, went out and exercised dharma. This is a sannyasa ideal.

He worked continuously only for the good of the world, himself deriving no personal benefit from his actions. How much care and love he bestowed on the cowherds of Vrindavan. Further, he was never attached to anything. From being born in a prison, to the pastures of Gokul, and from there to Vrindavan, Mathura, Dwaraka, and finally to Indraprastha, he never looked back. Such non-attachment is a characteristic of both, the ideal sannyasin as well as the ideal grihastha. Sri Ramakrishna says: 'Whether a man is a monk or a householder, he has to shake off all attachment from his mind.'[6]

When the Syamantaka jewel was taken by Jambavan after he killed the lion that had killed Prasena, a rumour spread that Sri Krishna had killed Prasena and taken the jewel. To wipe out the charge imputed to him, Sri Krishna went to the forest, fought Jambavan, and recovered the jewel. This sort of self-defence behoves the grihastha not the sannyasin.

Equanimity in honour and dishonour is a great virtue and strength. Sri Krishna was dishonoured when he went as an emissary to Duryodhana in an attempt to avoid the Kurukshetra War, but he was unaffected and composed. This was also true during the very war, in which he declared he would not wield any weapon. When once Bahulashva, the king of Mithila, invited Sri Krishna to his palace, the latter accepted the invitation, but he also visited a poor and pious brahmana called Shrutadeva—such was his same-sightedness. This virtue is to be cultivated by the sannyasin as well as by the grihastha.

Sri Krishna was a king and a statesman. He was married to Rukmini, Satyabhama, Jambavati, Satya, Lakshmana, Kalindi, Bhadra, Mitravinda, and to the sixteen thousand princesses that he rescued from prison. Though Satyabhama once kicked him, Sri Krishna did not show any signs of anger; instead he took her feet in his hands and mellowed her by asking whether her feet hurt. He always stood up for his wives, an ideal husband. Does all this mean that he was not a sannyasin? Was Sri Ramakrishna not a sannyasin? Certainly he was.

Sri Krishna is not just worshipped by grihasthas and sannyasins, he is also their respective goal. There has been no other exemplar householder and monk in one like Sri Krishna, except for that child of the Divine Mother born a hundred and seventy-five years ago, who said on many occasions: 'One who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna.'[7] Like Sri Krishna's, Sri Ramakrishna's life too was a grand synthesis of the grihastha and the sannyasin ideals.   ॐ

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Sri Krishna saving Bhima from the Narayana-astra
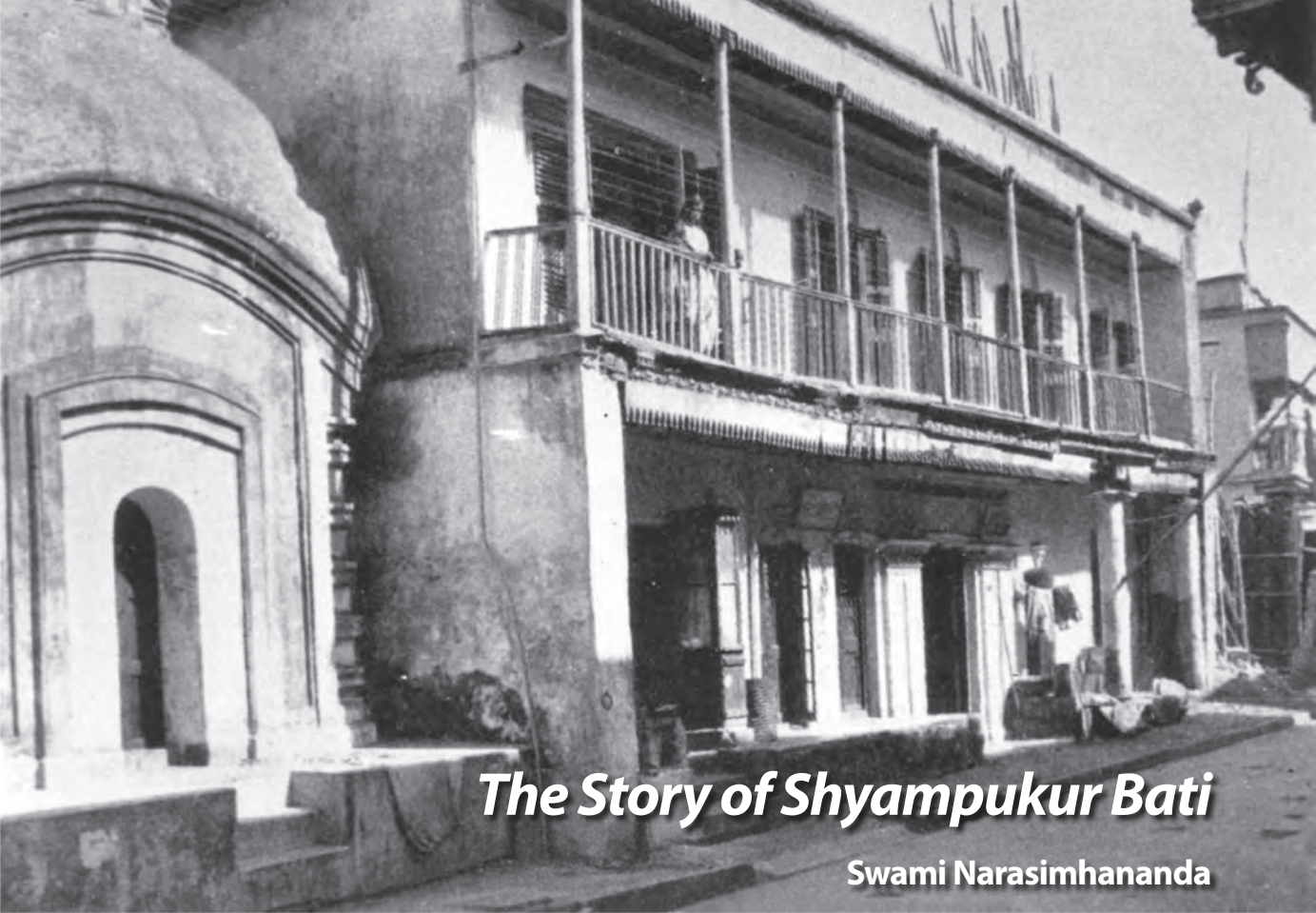
The Story of Shyampukur Bati

Swami Narasimhananda

A<small>S CALCUTTA GREW</small>, relegating older parts of the city to its backwaters and history, a small group of devotees for decades tenaciously clung and cared for a small nondescript and decrepit house in Shyampukur. This was the place where the ailing Sri Ramakrishna was brought for his treatment. As the Ramakrishna movement spreads all over the world, Shyampukur Bati, or Shyampukur House, has now become a tirtha, sacred place, as well as part of an important stage of the avatara's lila. The devoted attention and struggles for its continued existence will also be counted as the continuing lila of Sri Ramakrishna.

The House

Girish [Ghosh] had such abundant faith in the Master, was suddenly struck by this idea: 'The Master does not need to worship the Divine Mother for his own sake. If his pure love has inspired him to perform the worship, why would he sit there quietly, doing nothing? That does not seem right. Were these arrangements made for the devotees to worship the Divine Mother in the Master's living form and be blessed? It must be so.' He was overwhelmed with joy at that thought and immediately took flowers and sandal paste from a tray and offered them at the feet of the Master, saying, 'Victory to the Mother'.[1]

Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi, his face luminous and smiling, his hands assumed the gestures of the Kali image indicating that the Divine Mother Kali was revealing herself within him. It was around 7.30 p.m. on the Kali Puja day on Friday, 6 November 1885. The place was Shyampukur Bati.

Sri Ramakrishna was brought here on Friday, 2 October 1885[2] by his devotees to facilitate a

better treatment for his cancer. It was a rented house belonging to Gokul Bhattacharya, at 55 Shyampukur Street. Sri Ramakrishna stayed in this house for seventy days till 11 December 1885, when he was moved to a larger accommodation at Kashipur.[3] In this house he showered his grace upon many. It was in Shyampukur Bati that the famous actress Binodini Dasi came dressed as a gentleman to gain entry into Sri Ramakrishna's room and be blessed by him.

Shyampukur is a locality in present Kolkata. It is an assembly constituency of the state of West Bengal. Swami Prabhananda explains the origin of the name in his *Sri Ramakrishner Antyalila*: 'A renowned person of wealth of eighteenth century, Shobharam Basak renamed the locality Charles Bazaar as Shyambazar in honour of the priest of the ancient temple of Shyam, Shyam Rai or Gobinda. There was a *pukur*, pond, near the temple of Shyam. That led to the name Shyampukur.'[4]

Shyampukur is in the heart of what was Sutanuti. It was mentioned in the earliest list of police stations of Calcutta prepared in 1785. The British, after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, settled down to an organized administration in Calcutta. One of the developments was the police station that also provided civic facilities. The Police Commissioner doubled as Municipal Chairman till 1888. Shyampukur was one of the twenty-five Police Section Houses in 1888.[5]

'The earliest list of thanas, for both police and municipal administration, was prepared in 1785.'[6] The thirty-one names listed include Shyampukur.

This area was the citadel of the Bengali aristocracy. Baghbazar may be a corruption of *bank-bazar*, bazaar on a *bank* or bend of the canal; but it is commonly related to the riverside garden (*bagh*) owned by Captain Charles Perrin in the early eighteenth century. The bazaar was set up nearby on the property of Purnachandra Dey. The garden was sold by Perrin to the Company, which resold it in 1752 to J Z Holwell, the celebrated Zamindar or Collector, for Rs 2,500 (16).

Even before his stay at Shyampukur Bati, Sri Ramakrishna used to visit many houses in this area. Notable among them were the homes of Captain Vishwanath Upadhyay at 25 Shyampukur Street, Prankrishna Mukhopadhyay at 40 Ramdhan Mitra Lane, and Kalipada Ghosh at 20 Shyampukur Lane. Other devotees of Sri Ramakrishna—Purnachandra Ghosh, Narendranath Mitra, Devendra Ghosh,

Present view of Shyampukur Bati from Shyampukur Street

Prabuddha Bharata

and Narendra Bandyopadhyay—also lived in this locality. Mahamaya Mitra, Kalipada Ghosh's sister, lived at 28 Shyampukur Street.[7]

Built in 1823, Shyampukur Bati was originally a single-storey building. Another storey was added to one part of the house in 1836. Changing hands and altered many times, the house was bought by Gokul Bhattacharya when it was rented for Sri Ramakrishna. Gokul Bhattacharya sold the house in 1902. In 1915 it was bought by Kiran Chandra Bose. In 1938–9, Kiran split the house into two parts—55A and 55B. Eventually the house was divided into four parts—55A, 55B, 55C, and 55D.[8] 55A housed the place where Sri Ramakrishna had stayed, and the small enclosure where Sri Sarada Devi stayed fell in 55B. Kiran's descendants made even more alterations and let its rooms to various people. Their neglect and lack of maintenance made the house a sorry sight. In time 55A fell in the share of Santosh Bose and 55B in that of Maya Bose Ghosh. The Shiva temple that was to the west of this house remains intact today, as do many other landmarks of this locality.

Swami Saradananda has given a graphic description of Shyampukur Bati:

The house rented for the Master is on the north side of Shyampukur Street, which runs from east to west. When one enters the house one finds a vestibule with a narrow passage extending to one's right and left. A few steps ahead lies a courtyard, and to one's right is a staircase to the upper floor. On the eastern side of the courtyard are two to three rooms. After ascending the staircase, one sees to the right a long room extending from north to south, which was used for receiving visitors, and to one's left there is a corridor leading to rooms that extend from east to west. The first door on this corridor leads to a spacious room called the parlour, where the Master lived. To the north and south of the parlour are two verandas, the northern one larger than the southern. To the west of the parlour are two small rooms—one used by devotees who stayed overnight, and the other by the Holy Mother for sleeping. The visitors' room has a narrow veranda to the west. A staircase to the roof is at the eastern end of the corridor leading to the Master's room. At the top of those stairs, near the door to the roof, is a covered terrace of about six feet by six feet in size. The Holy Mother spent her days on that terrace, and there she cooked the special diet needed by the Master.[9]

Room on the terrace where Holy Mother spent her days

When Sri Ramakrishna stayed in this house there was no construction on the first floor on the right side of the building to the east.

Worship Resumes and Formation of the Sangha

Mahendranath Gupta, or M, the author of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, inspired many young men towards monasticism. Among them were Swamis Vishuddhananda, Samshuddananda, and Jitatmananda

(Vinay Maharaj). They joined the Ramakrishna Order and came to Shyampukur Bati in 1939–40 along with other senior swamis of the Order. They met the erstwhile tenant Sri Goswami and had recounted the event of Mother Kali revealing herself through Sri Ramakrishna. They expressed their wish to worship here the picture of Sri Ramakrishna on Kali Puja. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna has been worshipped here on every Kali Puja since 1940.

Room where Sri Ramakrishna stayed, now converted into a shrine

Gautam Gupta, the great grandson of Mahendranath Gupta, first visited this house in 1976 a few days before Kali Puja. He met Lakshmi Goswami, daughter of Sri Goswami, whom Swami Vishuddhananda and other swamis met in 1939–40. In 1976 the worship was performed by Swami Tathagatananda. Gautam Gupta and another devotee, Kalyan Ghosh, were also present. In 1977 Gautam offered to shoulder the responsibility of the annual worship. The famous singer Dhananjay Bhattacharya was also present during the Kali Puja of 1977. Some days later Dhananjay sponsored the basic repairs of the building through Bireshwar Banerjee, a contractor. The owner of the building Santosh Bose had no objection to the repairs, as he had no financial capacity himself.

Gautam came in touch with some devotees interested in the renovation of Shyampukur Bati. Among them were Sachin Das, Subrata Chakravarti, Keya Ghosh, Subir Bose, Sukumar Ghosh, Ajay Gunin, Dhiren Ghosh, Kamal Addyi, Debabrata Chakravarti, Banibrata Chakravarti, Nirmalya Bose, Samir Ghosh, Kalyan Bhattacharya, Ranjan Seal, Kalyan Ghosh, and Saroj Das. The initial repairs were carried out in early 1978. On 27 August 1978 an organization named Shyampukur Bati Sri Ramakrishna Smarana Sangha—hereafter referred to as Shyampukur Sangha—was formed to restore and preserve this building. A brief history of Shyampukur Bati in English was published in the *Statesman* and in Bengali in the daily *Jugantar*. Lectures on the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held on the second Saturday of every month. Apart from the Kali Puja, the birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda also began to be observed. In 1978 the Kali Puja worship was conducted under the aegis of the Shyampukur Sangha, and a souvenir detailing its activities was released in 1979 by the erstwhile president of the Ramakrishna Math, Baghbazar, Swami Hiranmayananda.

On 27 August 1980 the Shyampukur Sangha celebrated its foundation day. Swami Lokeshwarananda was the speaker and Dhananjay Bhattacharya sang devotional songs. Gradually many devotees learnt about Shyampukur Bati and started visiting the house. In April 1982 the owner Santosh Bose gave written permission for the renovation and repairs of the building. A few days later he fell ill and passed away. Fortunately, his written permission made it possible

to renovate this building, though finding the resources for the renovation was not easy. Shailen Mukhopadhyay, a devotee, took responsibility for the renovation and contacted many persons, some of whom came forward to help in the work.

Since 1980 there have been religious programmes held in Shyampukur Bati every Tuesday and Friday. On the Kali Puja of 1982 Swami Bhuteshananda, the erstwhile president of the Ramakrishna Math, Yogodyan, Kankurgachi, and vice president of the Ramakrishna Order, installed the photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda in the shrine. The centenary of Sri Ramakrishna's stay in Shyampukur Bati was celebrated in 1985. To match the number of days that Sri Ramakrishna stayed at the house, the celebrations went on for seventy days, from 2 October to 11 December 1985. The celebrations started with Vedic chanting by monks in the morning, and in the afternoon the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was brought from Balaram Bose's house to Shyampukur Bati. There were programmes from 4 to 8 p.m. on all the seventy days, which included readings from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, spiritual discourses, and devotional songs sung after the vesper service. Swami Gambhirananda, the then president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, also participated in the celebrations. On 11 December 1985, exactly as it occurred a century ago, two horse carriages were arranged to take Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi to the garden house at Kashipur.

Joint Purchase of the House and Inauguration

Friday, 16 February 1987 is an important date in the history of Shyampukur Bati. On that day Ranajit Bose, the eldest son of Santosh Bose and owner of 55A Shyampukur Street—the part of the house where Sri Ramakrishna stayed—agreed

to the sale of that portion for two lakh rupees. The Shyampukur Sangha had only one hundred and twenty-two rupees in the bank, but funds came unexpectedly from unfamiliar sources. The devotees and members of the Shyampukur Sangha were overwhelmed by this favourable turn of events. An agreement was made between the Shyampukur Sangha and the Ramakrishna Math, that as long as the tenant Lakshmi Goswami was alive the house would be looked after by the Shyampukur Sangha. Only on her passing away the Ramakrishna Math was to take over the house. In May 1988, 55A Shyampukur Street was purchased jointly by the Shyampukur Sangha and the Ramakrishna Math. The house still had some tenants then. The house still had some tenants then. This kind of joint purchase is rare in the history of the Ramakrishna Order. This became possible due to the persistent efforts of the members of the Shyampukur Sangha led by Gautam Gupta. The Ramakrishna Math deputed senior monks as advisors to the managing committee of the Shyampukur Sangha. On 2 October 1988 a homeopathic dispensary for the needy was started in this house, also as a reminder that the famous homeopath Dr Mahendralal Sarkar used to come to the house to treat Sri Ramakrishna.

In 1995 Deepak Ghosh, son of Maya Bose Ghosh and the owner of the portion of the house falling under 55B Shyampukur Street—where Sri Sarada Devi had stayed—was willing to sell it. After painstaking efforts and continuous deliberations the house was jointly purchased by the Shyampukur Sangha and the Ramakrishna Math on 28 October 2003. The tin partition between 55A and 55B Shyampukur Street was removed and a thorough renovation and restoration was started. On 16 December 2003, the 150th birth anniversary of Sri Sarada Devi, the room in which she had stayed was opened to the public. The original building plan of the house was ob-

Darkroom accessories

Main lens of the field camera used for taking the famous picture in which Sri Ramakrishna is seated

tained from the Municipal Corporation to facilitate its proper restoration. The work that started in July 2004 was completed in a year.

On 11 May 2005 the restored house and the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna were inaugurated by Swami Gahanananda, the erstwhile president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. On 26 October 2006 Swami Atmasthananda, the erstwhile vice president of the Ramakrishna Order inaugurated an art gallery-cum-museum on the first floor of the house. This museum houses the main lens of the field camera used for taking the third and most popular photograph of Sri Ramakrishna by Avinashchandra Dawn of Bourne and Shepherd Company. Among the other things displayed are paintings of various incidents that occurred during Sri Ramakrishna's stay here along with some articles used by him, some darkroom accessories used for printing the photo of Sri Ramakrishna mentioned earlier, and a marble-topped wooden cot used by him at the house of Kalipada Ghosh.

Even after the death of the tenant Lakshmi Goswami on 22 June 1995, 55A Shyampukur Street was maintained by the Shyampukur Sangha. On 18 November 2010 Shyampukur Bati was formally handed over to the Ramakrishna Math, which made it a sub-centre of its branch at the Ramakrishna Math, Balaram Mandir, Kolkata. Thus, this sacred place of pilgrimage was preserved, restored, and made open to the public by the Shyampukur Bati Sri Ramakrishna Smarana Sangha.

Devotees experienced Sri Ramakrishna's divinity not just on auspicious days, like Kali Puja, but had other opportunities to see the manifestation of his divinity and to have faith in him. Sri Ramakrishna's stay in Shyampukur also brought together different classes of devotees and bound them forever in his love. Shyampukur Bati became for devotees an entrance to partake of Sri Ramakrishna's and Holy Mother's divinity and love. Devotees who come on pilgrimage to this tirtha even now feel blessed. 🙏

Rumour: An Irresistible Social Phenomenon

Brahmachari Isharupachaitanya

K ING SATRAJIT POSSESSED the very precious gem Syamantaka, which he had received as a boon from the sun god. He in turn presented it to his brother Prasena. The members of the Yadu clan as well as some citizens of Dwaraka knew of Sri Krishna's fascination for Syamantaka. Sri Krishna along with some Yadavas and Prasena once went hunting in a forest. As the hunt was in sport the hunters gradually dispersed. Prasena, after drifting from the group, came face to face with a lion. The terrible fight was brief; the lion killed Prasena and took away Syamantaka. Jambavan, a mighty bear, saw the precious gem with the lion and killed it to possess the gem. The Yadavas searched Prasena and finally found his dead body in a remote part of the forest. The fact that Prasena was killed for Syamantaka was evident as the gem was missing. Some of the Yadavas started whispering among themselves as to how was it that Prasena went to the forest with Sri Krishna and died mysteriously! Is there any connection between Prasena's death and Krishna's desire for Syamantaka? After some time the news started circulating among Dwaraka's citizens: 'Sri Krishna, who was jealous of Prasena because he possessed the precious gem, had killed him.'[1]

The above story from the *Padma Purana* highlights a ubiquitous and timeless social phenomenon known as rumour. It is a feature of every social and organizational fabric, a primitive mode of communication, and 'the oldest medium in the world'.[2] Social evolution has supported this phenomenon, and it is here to stay as long as society exists.

What is Rumour?

Rumours thrive in all the areas where social interaction and communication take place: the World Wide Web, newspapers, cellphones, workspace, among friends and family, and so on. A Google search for the word 'rumour' yielded 8,260,000 web pages, while 'rumor' showed 39,900,000 web pages. In the Google-blog the results were

1,040,000 and 5,370,000 blogs respectively.[3] This gives one a fairly good idea of how rampant rumour is in the social fabric. As a manager of a software development firm quipped, 'We are swimming in rumours'.[4]

These waves of rumours often intrigue us: how and why does a baseless piece of information engage everyone, even the intelligent? The answers are many, though none fully satisfactory. Until it is properly known, any phenomenon with a bearing on life causes, consciously or unconsciously, anxiety. Delving into the nature and dynamics of rumour could resolve the mystery surrounding it and bring a sense of control over this psychological and social phenomenon.

Probably originated between 1325–75, the word 'rumour' meant 'noise', akin to the Sanskrit words *rāuti*, *rāvati*—(he) cries, roars.[5] Over the ages the word has undergone changes, like the messages it carries, and it now means 'a piece of information of questionable accuracy, from no known reliable source, usually spread by word of mouth'.[6] The academic definition is, however, a little more complicated: 'Unverified and instrumentally relevant information statements in circulation that arise in contexts of ambiguity, danger, or potential threat and that function to help people to make sense and manage risk.'[7]

Rumour differs from gossip in many ways, though people often wrongly use the terms interchangeably. Gossip concerns the private affairs of individuals, while rumour focuses on the larger sphere of events. A sibling of rumour and gossip is another phenomenon called 'urban legend' or 'urban myth', which is 'a story about an amusing or strange event that is supposed to have happened, which is often repeated and which many people believe is true'.[8] Examples are many; a popular one is: check your seat before sitting down in a movie theatre, because when a boy sat and felt a prick, he didn't think it was anything. After the movie he found blood on the pricked place. It turned out there was a needle placed infected with HIV. Urban legend differs from rumour chiefly in two ways: (i) rumours tend to be about a current topic or event, while urban legend is a recurrent story that migrates from place to place, country to country; (ii) urban legends have a long structure, whereas rumours are short and precise statements. Rumour, gossip, and urban legend—these three are commonly classed as hearsay. Rumour also differs from news in many respects; chiefly, news is a verified piece of information, whereas rumour is not. A comparison between news, rumour, gossip, and urban legend across various information dimensions is shown in Table I.[9]

Table 1

L = Low M = Medium H = High	Evidentiary Basis	Perceived Importance	Content about Individuals	Slanderous Content	Entertaining	Perceived Usefulness
Rumour	L	H	L / M / H	L / M / H	L / M / H	H
News	H	H	L / M / H	L / M / H	L / M / H	H
Gossip	L / M / H	L	H	H	H	L
Urban Legend	L	L	L / M / H	L / M / H	H	L

There are of course some nebulous forms: statements that are hard to classify as gossip, rumour, or urban legend. For instance: 'the boss is draining off money from the company fund to pay back his debts' has an element of both rumour and gossip.

Types and Effects of Rumours

Depending upon the criteria of analysis there can be various types of rumours. 'The rumour pie may be sliced in many ways.'[10] Among these categories, however, the most popular ones are 'dread rumours' and 'wish rumours'. This classification is based on the anxiety or fear associated with rumours. Dread rumours refer to fearsome or undesirable events or consequences. Wish rumours express hope for a positive or desirable outcome; they anticipate a possible end of a dreaded situation—like an ongoing war. Since people are averse to risk, dread rumours spread more frequently than wish rumours.

In August 2005, while crossing a bridge near Baghdad nine hundred and fifty Shiite pilgrims, who had assembled there in the thousands, died due to a stampede. Why? Panic from news of the presence of a suicide bomber in the crowd. It was a rumour.[11] When Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineshwar plunged into rigorous spiritual disciplines and was oblivious to the world, a rumour reached Sri Sarada Devi in Jayrambati that her husband had gone mad. This deeply disturbed her.

Rumour matters. It can have a greater negative effect on individuals and organizations than one can imagine. Research suggests that rumours may and do cause panic, spur social tensions, incite riots, affect economic activity, health, behaviour, and attitudes—even when the rumours are not strongly believed. For example, after the great Indian earthquake of 1934 it was observed that trips to Patna were cancelled due to the rumour that the city would cease to exist on that day (42).

Although such predictions are termed 'hoax', people apparently want to be safe rather than sorry. This is in keeping with the 'prospect theory' put forward by Kahnemen and Tversky in 1979, which says that we are loss-averse; we tend to feel losses more acutely than we feel equivalent gains.[12]

Effects of rumours, particularly organizational and corporate ones, can broadly be classified according to their external or internal effects. External effects refer to the fallout of rumours on society at large, or the reaction of a society on organizations. These include media attack, loss of reputation, decreased sales, loss of trust of customers or followers, and so on. These effects can be devastating. Investors in shares can endorse this fact. In the corporate world too the effects can be disastrous. In 1991 the false rumour of a soft drink called Tropical Fantasy containing some ingredients that made black men sterile caused its sales to drop by seventy percent; it even incited attacks on its delivery vans. New York Mayor David Dinkins, a prominent African American, had to drink Tropical Fantasy on television in an effort to prove that it was harmless.[13] Hearing negative or dread organizational rumours may cause its members increased uncertainty and anxiety, lowered job satisfaction, mutual distrust, and productivity. It also weighs heavily against organizational commitment, morale, trust in authority, and intention to stay in the organization. These are all internal effects of rumours. And the biggest is the stress on those who hear negative rumours. All these may affect an individual quite unconsciously.

Psychology of Rumour

Rumour has remained a fascinating field of study for psychologists for more than a century. Way

back in 1916 Bernard Hart, the famous author of *Psychology of Insanity*, wrote the paper 'The Psychology of Rumour'. Since then, and more so after World War II when rumours were abundant, psychological enquiry into the rumour phenomenon had gained momentum. But since rumour is a fleeting temporal phenomenon that leaves no traces for research, it was difficult for social psychologists to study it properly. Thanks to recent widespread computer mediated communication through social network platforms, research on rumour has taken a quantum leap. It helps researchers to access public data on rumour unobtrusively and in real-life situations without participants becoming aware of their involvement in the research. The psychological factors associated with the origin and spread of rumour can chiefly be classified into three categories.

Making Sense · Ambiguous situations are problematic because it frustrates one of our core motivations: to understand and act effectively. So when some information does *not* fit or fails to convey any meaning, we refer to the group to understand the situation and act on it effectively. In the absence of any formal information a group attempts to make sense of ambiguous, uncertain, or confusing data through informal interactions popularly called the grapevine. This is precisely what gives rise to rumour. Observing this tendency to explain any ambiguous situation, G W Allport and L J Postman remarked: 'In ordinary rumour we find a marked tendency for the agent to attribute *causes* to events, *motives* to character, a *raison d'etre* to the episode in question.'[14] But explanations that are offered must pass through the group norms of plausibility. When the group standard of plausibility is high, or when the group members are sufficiently intelligent and are not gullible, rumours take the shape of fact-finding. On the other hand, if the group standard is low, rumours often give rise to contagion

or panic. A 'group' is not confined to a particular region or boundary; it includes persons who are involved in spreading the rumour.[15]

Managing Threat · Apart from making sense, rumours also serve to manage threat. This is another core human motivation: controlling the environment or protecting one's self-image. In threatening situations, like a possible company downsizing or changes in an organization, people feel their welfare or sense of self is at risk. There also may be the threat to one's health and life, as in catastrophic situations like earthquakes, floods, and so on. For example, rumours were abounding after the great Indian earthquake of 1934 and the Chernobyl nuclear accident of 1986.

Enhancing Relationship and Self-image · Social relationships are vital for social sanity and survival. Building and maintaining social relationships is reflected in a variety of everyday transactions, of which rumour is one of them. In ambiguous situations we make use of rumours to foster our relationships with close acquaintances. They may also prove as valuable sources of information that enhance social status. This boosts our cherished self-esteem or self-image.

What has been discussed above are the primary functions of rumour. Secondary functions include entertainment, wish-fulfilment, and enforcement of communal or group norms. It is important to note that all of us are not rumour-mongers. An insecure person or a person with conflicts is more prone to be a rumour-monger.

Rumour Dynamics

'Rumours of all shapes and sizes often enter by the way of the auditory canal, exit through the oral cavity, and make an important stop along the way: the cerebrum' (89). These three anatomical locations actually symbolize three phases in the

spread of a rumour: reception, evaluation, and transmission. We have already seen how different psychological factors, under ambiguous and threatening situations, give birth to rumours. These rumours travel from mouth to mouth or through social interaction channels and spread to the group. The group may be closed, like office colleagues, or open, like an Internet community. While evaluating this rumour internally and transmitting it further, a rumour-monger distorts the message to make it more meaningful. These distortions or changes can broadly be categorized as 'levelling', 'adding', 'sharpening', and 'assimilation'.

Due to the inherent limitation in human attention, perception, and memory the content of a rumour loses details and length at each stage of transmission. This occurs in order to make the rumour easy to be grasped. This process is called 'levelling'. This is operative especially during the early stages of transmission.

Human imagination also plays a role in rumour transmission. The agents of a rumour often add details to the rumour content to thus fill in the gaps and make the rumour look more realistic. This process is known as 'adding'—snowballing or fabrication.

We are perceptually biased. We pick up certain details from a message and highlight them, while ignoring some other details. This highlighting of certain details in the rumour message is technically called 'sharpening'. This may result due to exaggeration.

To make a rumour more thematically coherent and plausible, to complete the incomplete data, to simplify complex information, and to fit it into our expectations, a holistic and a higher level pattern of change takes place in the rumour content. This overall shaping of rumour content—through levelling, adding, and sharpening—so as to fit the rumour content with the personal cognitive schemas, is known as 'assimilation' (135–6).

Let us revert to the opening story. We may surmise how the above processes might have been at play in brewing up the rumour.

• Rumour content: Prasena went to the forest for hunting with Sri Krishna. He died mysteriously and a precious gem was missing from his neck.

• Levelling: Sri Krishna and Prasena went hunting. Prasena was killed for a precious gem.

• Adding: Sri Krishna, in the pretext of hunting, killed Prasena in the forest for a precious gem.

• Sharpening: Sri Krishna killed Prasena for a precious gem.

• Assimilation: Sri Krishna was jealous of the precious gem that Prasena had and killed the latter.

Rumours can be compared to the 'memes' of Richard Dawkins, in the sense that rumours survive through processes similar to natural selection: unfit rumours die—they stop circulating—whereas fit ones gain currency over time.[16] Those true rumours that are transmitted precisely are called 'stars'; those distorted towards falsehood while being transmitted are called 'grainies'. False rumours that are transmitted precisely are called 'counterfeits', and those distorted towards truth are termed 'hopefuls'.

Psychologists see rumour as serially transmitted information from one participant to another. The rumour moves from person to person in a serial manner and in a series of single interactions. At each point there is an interaction between one person who knows the rumour and one who does not. A serial chain looks like this: A → B → C → D → E →. In a serial transmission mode observed in laboratory settings of a controlled experiment, 'levelling' is more dominant than the other processes of change.

Sociologists have the tendency to see rumour as a message that is transmitted in circular patterns. This is also known as 'collaborative approach' to rumour study, and the focus is how a group collaboratively affects the content. In real-life situations this type of transmission is more prevalent. Here 'adding' has a greater role to play than 'levelling'. It is also very important to note that in the collaborative type of transmission, due to multiple interactions, rumours tend to be more accurate over time—given that the group has a high standard of plausibility. Here accuracy refers to the verity or truthfulness of the rumour content with fact. Organizational rumours, evidence supports, tend to be accurate over time.

With what we have learnt so far about rumour, we can construct an integrated model of rumour as shown:

Why do people believe in rumours? In other words: What is there in a rumour that leads people to believe in it? We can refer to Egon Brunswick's 'lens model' for an answer.[17] This model proposes that we infer judgements on remote matters on the basis of proximate cues. Is there then any proximate cue based upon which people lend credibility to a rumour? Yes. There are at least four such cues.

In the first place, a person is more likely to believe in a rumour if it is consistent with his attitude. If it supports or accords with what the person already holds to be true, he or she will give greater credence to the rumour. Secondly, rumours heard from more credible, authoritative, and well-positioned sources would tend to be more strongly believed in than would rumours heard from less credible, authoritative, and well-positioned sources. Third, the more one hears a

An Integrated Model of Rumour
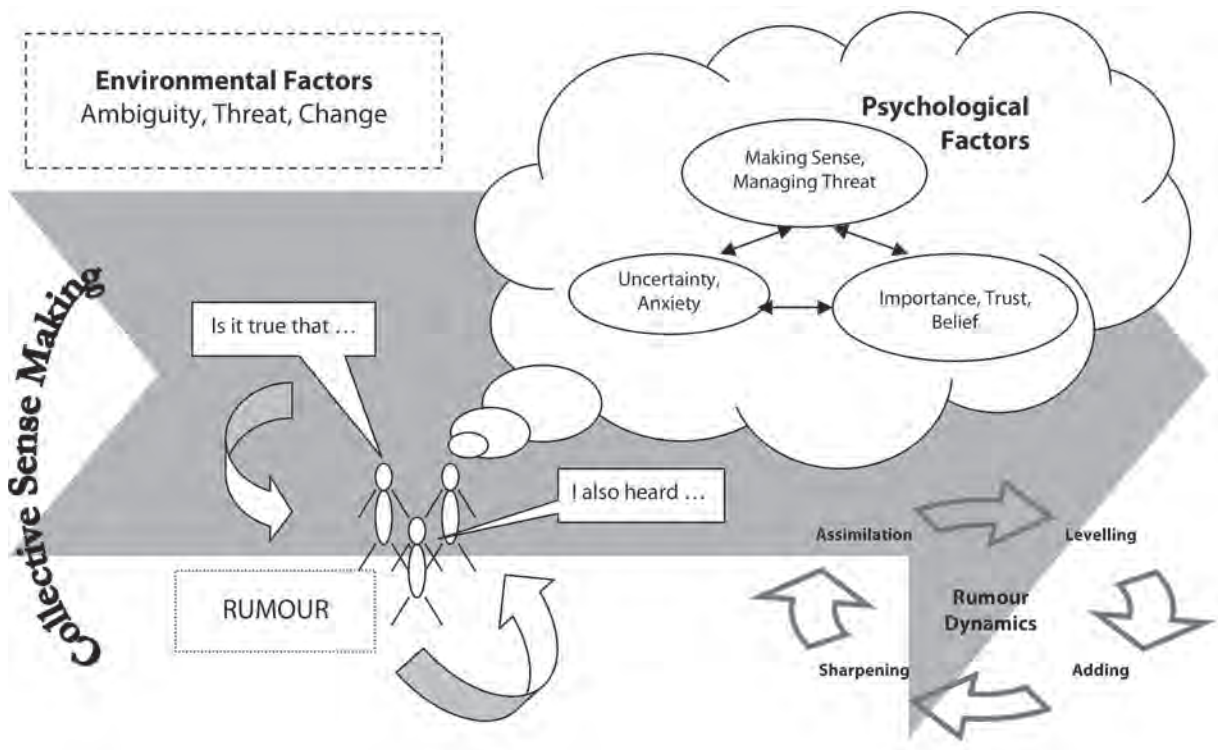
rumour the more strongly one starts believing in it. Belief in a rumour is positively associated with repetition. Finally, a rumour gains currency if it is not refuted by an appropriate authority.

Conclusion

We have seen that rumour is a social phenomenon that exists because the individual as well as the collective psychology of people take part in it. It can have negative effects on individuals in a much bigger way than we can think of. We have also seen how a message gets distorted in the process of transmission and the factors that render credibility to a rumour. What is the conclusion then? Rumour is a mixture of *satya*, truth, and *anrita*, untruth; a typical illustration of maya. 'If maya is once recognized', said Sri Ramakrishna, 'it feels ashamed of itself and takes to flight.'[18] When one knows a mirage to be a mirage, one automatically stops running after it. To know something is to objectify it. With what we have learnt about the rumour phenomenon, we are capable of objectifying rumour as a process rather than being carried away by it. We then gain a sense of control over rumours. Thus, when we hear a piece of information from an inappropriate source and authority, which we cannot easily verify, we can consider it to be a rumour

and simply let it pass. If we are still disturbed by it, we could try confirming it from an appropriate formal source. Even if that is impossible then simply forget the rumour with the deliberation that the original message has gone through the rumour mill and has been distorted bit by bit. Above all, if we wait a little while the truth will come out by itself.   ◆

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14. *The Psychology of Rumour*, 121.
15. See *Rumour Psychology: Social and Organizational Approaches*, 14.
16. See Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 195.
17. See Egon Brunswick, Perception and the Representative Design of Psychological Experiments (California: University of California, 1956), 142.
18. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, 1996), 336.

If you want to live a happy, contented life, stop criticizing others. Do not find fault with others. It is better to pass the time sleeping than gossiping and criticizing. Keep away from places where you find such talk going on. Try to see the good qualities in others. This is the way to get rid of the habit of fault-finding. Evil qualities pollute the mind of a person who searches for the lapses and shortcomings of others.

—*Swami Adbhutananda:*
Teachings and Reminiscences, 130,

Olive Wings

Dr Alpana Ghosh

I T WAS A LATE SATURDAY AFTERNOON and the college hours were almost over. I was in the laboratory busy overseeing the chemistry practical classes and warning the BSc honours students to finish quickly as the bell was about to ring. The lab assistant brought me a visiting card saying that someone wanted to see me. A bit puzzled, I thought: who could be the visitor at this time, during college hours? I glanced at the visiting card, it read: Lieutenant S Tirky. I was not able to remember any army personnel I knew; all the same, I went to meet the unknown Lieutenant.

'Good afternoon ma'am,' she greeted me. I was astonished; standing in front of me in an olive-green uniform and with a broad smile was our ex-student Sunita. Was it a miracle? I remembered a tall and well built introverted girl, but what I saw now was an elegant young lady wearing an impeccable uniform. After we hugged I asked her how did this transformation take place. 'I will tell you later ma'am, but I have now come to invite you. My parents would like you to come to dinner at our home tomorrow. Please ma'am, would you come?' I gladly accepted her invitation and led her to the laboratory where I introduced her to the students.

The girls looked at her with bewilderment and respect; they could not imagine that someone from their college, who had worked in the same lab where they were now seated, had become an army officer. They excitedly asked her questions. Sunita answered them one by one. She explained how she passed the Combined Defence Services Examination, what her train-ing was about, and other things regarding her career. She was in Namkum, near Ranchi, and this was her second posting after being promoted from Second Lieutenant to Lieutenant. I kept gazing at her, delighted by the composed look and easy way of talking. I congratulated her again. She smiled and promised to tell me her whole story the next day at dinner. She left in her military jeep. On my way home my mind was flooded with memories of Sunita.

Transforming Words

The first time I saw her was in the first year BSc class, seated in the corner of the last bench. She was a tall nice looking tribal girl who used to sit daily in the same place and who was never interested in any interactive question-answer session. Even when asked a question she used to reply: 'I don't know ma'am.' One day in the teacher's room I enquired whether anyone had taken notice of her. Almost all the teachers said: 'Oh! You are asking about roll number 12; she is a stubborn girl. She never takes interest in any class or answers any question, sits on the last bench without the least motivation for any subject and is not interested in practicals either.' I was surprised to find that every teacher had noticed her behaviour in class.

The next day I asked roll number 12 to meet me after class. She came and I took her to a study room where we were alone. I asked her: 'What is your name?' 'Sunita, ma'am,' she replied. 'Can I ask you why you don't take interest in any class? Do you have the necessary textbooks?' She lowered her head and kept silent. I continued: 'If you don't have the textbooks just tell me; I can

give them to you. And you also know that all textbooks are available in the library.' 'I have got the books ma'am,' she answered. 'Then what is your problem?' I retorted. Then, calming down, I softly asked her: 'Would you tell me your problem? I could help you. I would like you to be a good student.' She paused for a long while and quietly took out a photograph from her notebook. It was the photograph of a young boy of about seventeen. She kept looking at the photograph and her eyes became moist. 'Who is he?' I asked. 'My only brother,' she replied. She then narrated her plight: One evening she went shopping with her brother and while returning some miscreants kept teasing her and tried to snatch her purse. Her brother could not restrain himself and started fighting them. They were four and her brother was alone. They hit him on the back and he fell. She was somehow saved by the crowd, which came to their aid. She took her brother to the hospital, but even after a prolonged treatment he could not be cured; he became a cripple forever as his spinal cord was injured. The whole family was shattered by the incident. She was feeling guilty about it and lost all her self-confidence; she was not able to even speak properly, so she avoided answering questions in class. Obviously, she could not concentrate on her studies due to her constant guilt. She always carried her brother's photograph and prayed for him. Her father was about to retire from his job and she was the only one to support the family, but she was not able to concentrate on anything or think in any way in which she could help them.
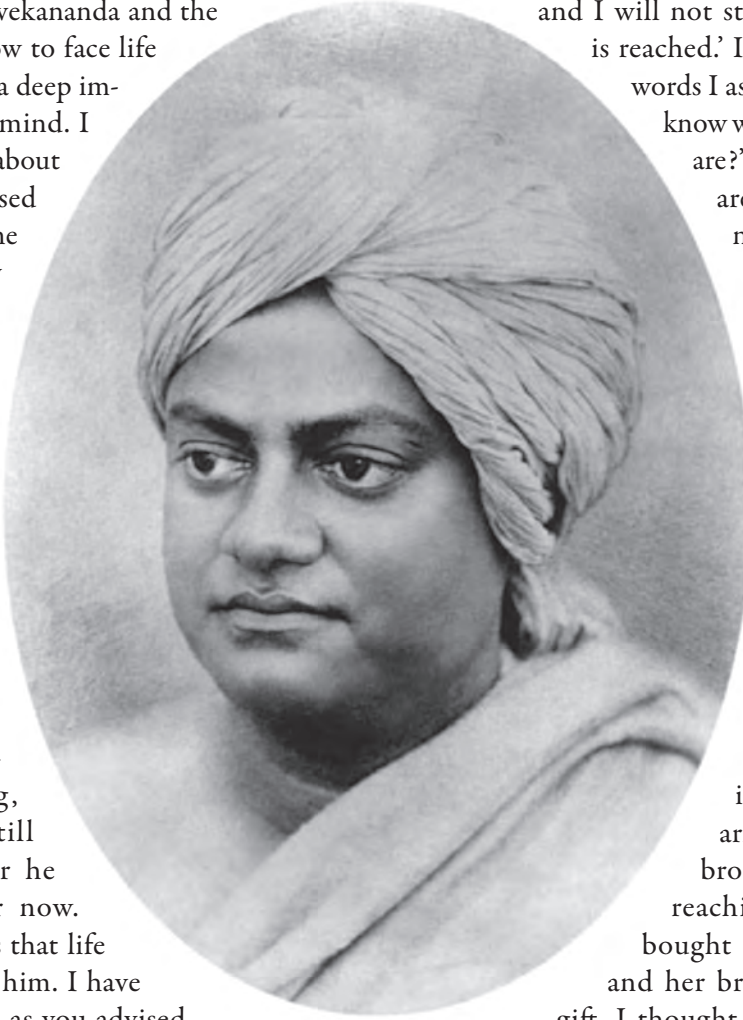
I had no adequate words to console her; I simply said: 'What has happened, has happened; it cannot be reversed. But you can help your family by being strong. Do you know Swami Vivekananda's expression "face the brutes"? There was an interesting incident in the swami's

life, in which he was chased by some large monkeys in Banaras, and the faster he ran, the faster came the monkeys; they even tried to bite him. From the opposite side an old monk shouted, "face the brutes!" He then turned and boldly faced the monkeys, which instantly stopped, fell behind, and fled. Later the great swami said in one of his lectures: "That is a lesson for all life—face the terrible, face it boldly. Like the monkeys, the hardships of life fall back when we cease to flee before them."' She looked intensely in my eyes and asked: 'How can I ma'am?' 'The first thing is to be strong; you have to look ahead as you are now the pivot of your family. You are tall and well-built. Do you have any interest in sports?' 'I was a good athlete in school, but now …', she lamented. I requested her to take part in college sports and to also join the National Cadet Corps (ncc). Her eyes brightened: 'I'll do it ma'am. I'll try my best.' Again I quoted another of Swamiji's saying: 'Strength is life, weakness is death.' 'You have to be strong enough to look after your brother. Only mourning and remaining sad will not bring any good to you, your brother, or your family. You have to take a positive step to help them.' She promised me to properly follow these suggestions.

Henceforth Sunita was seen taking interest in class. She met me several times to solve problems of different lessons and different subjects. Slowly her performance improved. After about six months, in January, she came to me one day with a packet in her hands and said: 'Ma'am, please bless me.' 'What for?' She then opened the packet: it was a medallion. She excitedly explained that she had won it in a speech competition on the National Youth Day, Swami Vivekananda's birthday. I wondered: this same girl who was so shy and remained sad in class won a prize in a speech competition, and that too on Swami Vivekananda's life! I blessed

her heartily and asked her how was it possible. She replied: 'The story you told me about Swami Vivekananda and the monkeys and how to face life situations made a deep impression on my mind. I told my brother about it and we purchased some books on the swami's life. They were so inspiring that the course of our lives has changed since then. My brother has taken admission to the Indira Gandhi Open University for graduation course through distance learning, and though still in a wheelchair he is much better now. He never thinks that life has stopped for him. I have joined the NCC, as you advised me. I had prepared my speech with my brother's help and went on the stage with full confidence. And see, I won the prize!' I told her to always remember that it was Swamiji who had helped her to come out of the terrible situation they were in. In my heart I also prayed to Swamiji for their success.

Months passed and Sunita met me again after the final BSc results. She graduated with honours, second class. This naturally made her happy and gave her more self-assurance. I asked her, 'What next?' and she replied very confidently, 'Ma'am, I have fixed my goal and I will not stop till that goal is reached.' Impressed by her words I asked her, 'Do you know whose words these are?' 'Yes ma'am, these are Swami Vivekananda's words', and she then quoted the swami: 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached.' I was deeply touched.

I lost contact with Sunita for years, till that afternoon when she came to meet me in her olive-green army uniform and broad smile. Before reaching her house I bought gifts for Sunita and her brother. The best gift, I thought, was a book on Swami Vivekananda titled *My India, the India Eternal*.

Wings of a Dream

The next evening I reached her nicely decorated home. Sunita was in a simple civilian dress. She introduced me to her parents, then to her brother Joy—a bright young man using a walker. Sunita told me that Joy had taken up the Company Secretaryship course through distance learning and plans to start his own company. This was great

news for me that he had started his life afresh. I greeted and handed him the book, which he appreciated very much. Sunita's mother came and said with folded hands: 'You have saved us from great disaster.' I replied: 'It was not me but Swami Vivekananda. In every step of life we need his guidance.' Then, I quoted Swamiji: 'Whoever works at a thing with his whole heart receives help from God.' 'Your children have struggled and had patience, that's why the sun has again risen in your lives.'

Sunita led me to where there was a big portrait of Swami Vivekananda, just above the study table. Both brother and sister said they read at least one passage from Swamiji's books every morning before starting their day. Sunita said: 'Ma'am, your words made such a deep impression, and I told Joy about it after coming from college. He too was moved. We started reading Swamiji's works and got inspiration every day. Gradually, I started gaining confidence and joined the NCC, took part in different sports, and fixed up the goal to become an army officer, which I thought was the best option for me. I failed in the entrance test, but Joy encouraged me to reappear. The next time I succeeded. My first posting was at Jammu and Kashmir, and from there I was posted to Namkum, Ranchi, near my native place, where I am now.' I asked her: 'What is your assignment?' She smiled: 'I am looking after Logistics—by now I have learned to "face the brute" very well. Bless me so that I can always continue on the right path.' I was touched by her success story.

We had a nice dinner together with her family. Sunita's parents were very humble. Joy was a nice boy who talked about his plans for the future with great enthusiasm. All of us enjoyed the meeting. On my way back, I kept thinking of how a whole family was transformed by just a spark from Swami Vivekananda's life and teachings.

References and Notes

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9. *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, 873.

Sri Ramakrishna:
The 'New Man' of the Age – II

Swami Bhajanananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

THE MATERNAL ASPECT of Sri Rama-krishna's personality manifested itself fully through his spiritual consort Sri Sarada Devi, who came to be known as Holy Mother. During her stay at Dakshineswar Sri Rama-krishna trained and groomed her from a young age to look upon all people as her own children. After his passing away, universal motherhood bloomed fully in her immaculate heart and she became the mother of all—the young and the old, saints and sinners, the rich and the poor, illumined souls and robbers. About this universal motherhood she later told a disciple of hers: 'My boy, you must be aware that the Master looked upon all in the world as Mother. He left me behind for demonstrating that motherhood to the world.'[14]

Culmination of Five Thousand Years of Indian Spirituality

Yet another unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna's incarnate life, pointed out by Swami Vivekananda, is that it represents the culmination of the millennia-old spirituality of India. Wrote Swamiji: 'This man had in fifty-one years lived the five thousand years of national spiritual life.'[15] Romain Rolland also wrote: 'The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people.'[16] What does this 'consummation' of spirituality mean? At least three main tasks accomplished by Sri Ramakrishna

are implied in it. These are: reliving scriptural truths, revitalization of spiritual paths and traditions, and integrating the spiritual consciousness of earlier prophets and deities into his own spiritual consciousness.

Living Commentary on the Scriptures · The first task Sri Ramakrishna accomplished was to revalidate, verify, and authenticate the eternal truths of the scriptures by reliving them. Thus he revealed their universal significance and showed their relevance in the modern world. From time immemorial countless sages and saints have realized the eternal truths of religion and thus borne testimony to them. But they did it only with regard to some particular aspect of the ultimate Reality—*saguṇa*, personal, or *nirguṇa*, impersonal, *sākāra*, iconic, or *nirākāra*, aniconic, or any particular deity. Sri Ramakrishna realized all the aspects of the ultimate Reality and made them a living force in his life. In this way his whole life became a living commentary on the scriptures.

The eternal truths of Hinduism lie deeply embedded in the Vedas. Sri Ramakrishna brought out their universal significance for all humanity. This task was completed by Swami Vivekananda, who made the eternal truths of Vedanta available to Hindus of all classes and castes as well as to all humanity.

The Vedas present two problems. Since the transcendental truths were discovered by different sages and recorded at different times, the

Vedas contain diverse and often mutually inconsistent or contradictory concepts. The first problem was to reconcile or harmonize these diverse concepts. Traditional commentators such as Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhva, and others tried to solve this problem by a one-sided interpretation of Vedic passages in such a way as to make the scriptures support their respective schools of philosophy. As a result several mutually contradictory and polemical interpretations of the scriptures have come into existence. It was left to Sri Ramakrishna to solve the problem.

Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that the ultimate Reality known as Brahman is beyond words and thought. As he put it: 'What Brahman is cannot be described. All things in this world ... have been defiled [*ucchiṣṭa*], like food that has been touched by the tongue, for they have been read or uttered by the tongue. Only one thing has not been defiled in this way, and that is Brahman. No one has been able to say what Brahman is.'[17] But Brahman, although one, manifests in many ways. The traditional commentators have only dealt with these expressions of Brahman; each of them has highlighted one particular aspect. Their views are all correct in their own universes of discourse. They are mutually complementary, for, to know the full glory of Brahman, we have to take all of them together, and also go beyond them and seek Brahman through direct realization. This is the approach Sri Ramakrishna followed in harmonizing different interpretations of the scriptures.

The second problem the Vedas present is that owing to their great antiquity and the discontinuity of Vedic tradition many of their passages have become obscure. Since traditional commentators are mainly interested in establishing the superiority of their own philosophical schools, they explained in detail only those passages that support their views. In some places they have even changed the original import of scriptural passages. In this confusing situation, which prevailed in India for several centuries, Sri Ramakrishna's life, experiences, and teachings have brought a new light in which all truths, principles, and concepts are seen in the right perspective. In Sri Ramakrishna's life Vedic truths come to life, they become living facts. Referring to the importance of Sri Ramakrishna's life in understanding scriptural passages and the universal significance of eternal truths inherent in them, Swami Vivekananda wrote in a letter to his disciple Alasinga Perumal, who was in Madras:

> The life of Shri Ramakrishna was an extraordinary searchlight under whose illumination one is able to really understand the whole scope of Hindu religion. He was the object-lesson of all the theoretical knowledge given in the Shastras (scriptures). ... The Vedas can only be explained and the Shastras reconciled by his theory of Avastha or stages—that we must not only tolerate others, but positively embrace them, and that truth is the basis of all religions.[18]

In Sri Ramakrishna's life one can see the true significance of not only Vedantic truths, but also the spiritual truths of other Hindu scriptures such as the Gita, the Puranas, and the Agama literature. The eternal truths enshrined in the scriptures of other religions, such as the Bible, also become living realities in Sri Ramakrishna's life.

Revitalization of Spiritual Paths · The second task Sri Ramakrishna accomplished was the revitalization of diverse spiritual paths and methods. In the course of more than four thousand years of Indian culture innumerable spiritual paths, techniques, and disciplines were developed by many rishis, sages, and saints. But owing to several causes many of these spiritual

traditions gradually ceased to be in vogue or were forgotten. Moreover, in their place some degenerate cults and immoral practices came to be introduced. These distortions of true religion cast long shadows on true spiritual paths. There were also new paths introduced by other religions, which came from outside India. This was the situation that prevailed in several parts of India when Sri Ramakrishna began his sadhanas at Dakshineswar.

From the time he came to Dakshineswar, at the age of nineteen, Sri Ramakrishna remained absorbed in spiritual practices for twelve years. During this period he followed the various spiritual paths of bhakti, yoga, tantra, and so on, which culminated in the practice of Advaita sadhana. He then followed, just for the delight of experiencing God in different ways, the spiritual paths of other religions such as Islam and Christianity. He practised all these sadhanas with extraordinary vigour and intensity and attained the goal of each sadhana in a very short time. In the history of hagiography this is the first and only instance of one person following so many spiritual paths and attaining success in all of them in an incredibly short time.

What are the consequences of Sri Ramakrishna's practice of various spiritual disciplines? What are the contributions Sri Ramakrishna made to the field of sadhana? The following are some of the major contributions made by Sri Ramakrishna to the sadhana aspect of spiritual life.

(i) He showed the validity of different paths of bhakti in realizing God. By practising the devotional moods or attitudes known as *śānta*, *dāsya*, and so on, he demonstrated that all of them are equally effective as means of God realization, and one may choose any one of them according to one's temperament. He established that jnana yoga and bhakti yoga are not mutually contradictory, and that the knowledge of Brahman can be attained through either of them. He followed the esoteric occult and slippery paths prescribed by the tantras and validated them as means of attaining spiritual illumination, but did not recommend them to others. He even practised the physical processes of hatha yoga.

Furthermore, he showed that the spiritual paths of other religions such as Christianity and Islam are also valid means for the realization of God. By attaining success through various spiritual disciplines Sri Ramakrishna not only established the validity of all paths, he also corrected the wrong notion that one's own path alone is true and all other paths are wrong, which had prevailed all over the world for centuries.

(ii) By his uncompromising insistence on purity of mind and renunciation of lust and lucre, Sri Ramakrishna brought about a thorough cleansing of the whole field of sadhana. Owing mainly to the influence exerted by him and Swami Vivekananda—and also of course owing to the influence of modern education—many of the degenerate practices that had crept into Hinduism have been eliminated.

(iii) Another contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to the field of sadhana is the great importance he attached to *vyākulatā*—intense aspiration or deep longing for God—in attaining success in sadhana. Although Sri Ramakrishna taught that God can be realized through all paths, he also qualified that statement with the clause, provided 'people feel sincere longing ... for God'.[19] It is intense aspiration that gives motive power to sadhana. With intense longing any path, any yoga—jnana, bhakti, or even karma yoga—can lead to God realization. Without longing no yoga will be effective. He used to say: 'Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the Sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God' (83). It should

be noted here that what Sri Ramakrishna called *vyākulatā* is not ordinary aspiration, not a pious wish, but intense yearning for God. It is this intensity of aspiration, tremendous fervour or zeal that Sri Ramakrishna emphasized in Indian spirituality.

(iv) Along with aspiration, prayer was also given prime importance by Sri Ramakrishna. This is clear from the fact that in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, he has referred to prayer more than forty times. Prayer is a mental act of dependence on God. When a person realizes the limitations of his own inner resources, he or she seeks divine assistance, and God responds with his grace. The opening of the human heart to divine grace is what prayer means. Explaining prayer Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Through prayer all individual souls can be united to the Supreme Soul. Every house has a connection for gas, and gas can be obtained from the main storage-tank of the Gas Company. Apply to the Company, and it will arrange for your supply of gas. Then your house will be lighted' (205). And he gives this assurance: 'Let me assure you that a man can realize his Inner Self through sincere prayer' (256). 'One should pray to God with a longing heart. God certainly listens to prayer if it is sincere. There is no doubt about it' (256–7). Only an avatara can give such a divine assurance.

I t is to save sinners and the afflicted that the Master incarnated. If someone takes shelter under him with all sincerity, he just passes his hand of mercy over the supplicant and wipes away all his sins. By his divine touch, one becomes sinless then and there. What is wanted is sincere love for him and the absolute surrender to him.

—Swami Shivananda,
For Seekers of God, 264

Vyākulatā and *prārthanā*, prayer, occupy a central place in Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. The larger, universal significance of Sri Ramakrishna's emphasis on longing and prayer is not widely appreciated or understood yet. The Rig Veda and other Samhitas, which constitute the earliest part of the Vedas, are full of prayers. But in later centuries when *jñāna-mārga*, yoga, and other direct paths were developed, prayer came to be neglected. By reviving prayer Sri Ramakrishna has recovered for the modern world the original spiritual ambience of Vedic India.

Sri Ramakrishna's revival of prayer has another significance. Western spirituality is basically Christian spirituality, and Christian spirituality is centred on prayer. Most of the spiritual practices and experiences in Christianity come under the term 'prayer'. Therefore, it may be said that by reviving prayer in Hinduism Sri Ramakrishna has built a bridge between Indian and Western forms of spirituality.

(v) Yet another contribution of Sri Ramakrishna to spirituality is his strong advocacy of individual freedom in choosing a spiritual path. Everyone is born with certain samskaras, latent tendencies, which determine a person's temperament, attitude, and feelings. One should choose a spiritual path that is in accord with one's temperament and attitudes. If one chooses a wrong path, one's spiritual progress will be retarded. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: '*Kokhano kāhāro bhāva naṣṭa korite nai*; nobody's spiritual attitude should be destroyed.' He would give spiritual instruction according to each person's inherent spiritual tendencies. As people are in different stages of mental development, Sri Ramakrishna would help each person to lift himself or herself up from whichever level he or she was at.

Integration of Spiritual Experiences of the Past · We have been discussing the grounds

for describing Sri Ramakrishna's life as the culmination of five thousand years of spiritual life of the Indian people. We have examined two reasons for it: that he relived the truths of the scriptures and that he rejuvenated the spiritual paths and traditions. We now come to the third ground: he integrated into his own consciousness the spiritual consciousness of earlier prophets, incarnations, and deities. Sri Ramakrishna was the first and only person to realize the transcendental reality of different avataras, prophets, and Hindu deities. The unique feature of his experiences was that each transcendental vision culminated in the merger of the being of the avatara or prophet into the person of Sri Ramakrishna. In this way Sri Ramakrishna came to embody in himself the spiritual consciousness of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Christ, Muhammed, and also Hindu deities. What is the significance of this strange phenomenon? Swami Vivekananda has offered an explanation. He said:

> Now, I shall tell you a theory, which I will not argue now, but simply place before you the conclusion. Each man in his childhood runs through the stages through which his race has come up; only the race took thousands of years to do it, while the child takes a few years. The child is first the old savage man—and he crushes a butterfly under his feet. The child is at first like the primitive ancestors of his race. As he grows, he passes through different stages until he reaches the development of his race. Only he does it swiftly and quickly.[20]

This theory that Swamiji is expounding is similar to, or an extension of, the well-known biological theory called the 'Theory of Recapitulation' or 'Biogenetic Law', originally propounded by Von Baer and restated by Ernst Haeckel, both nineteenth-century German zo-

ologists. The theory is tersely worded as follows: 'Ontogeny is a recapitulation of phylogeny'. It means that the individual development of an organism is a repetition of its evolutionary history. What actually happens is that every animal in its embryonic state passes through the embryonic stages of its evolutionary ancestors. According to the modern theory of evolution, vertebrates evolved from fishes to amphibians to reptiles to mammals to human beings. It has been observed that the human body in its embryonic state passes through the embryonic states of fish, amphibian, reptile, and primitive mammal.[21]

Though not discussed much in recent times, the above theory was quite well-known at the end of the nineteenth century, and it is possible that Swamiji was familiar with it. Swamiji's theory applies to the mental level. At the mental level a human being from its childhood passes through the stages through which the early human beings have passed. Exceptions to this rule may be seen in several individual cases, but Swamiji's theory applies to the human race taken as an organic whole. Swamiji continues his above discourse: 'Now, take the whole humanity as a race, or take the whole of the animal creation, man and the lower animals, as one whole. There is an end towards which the whole is moving. Let us call it perfection.'[22]

Swamiji extends his view to the spiritual level and holds that the spiritual evolution of human beings also follows a similar pattern. He continues: 'Some men and women are born who anticipate the whole progress of mankind. Instead of waiting and being reborn over and over again for ages until the whole human race has attained to that perfection, they, as it were, rush through them in a few short years of their life. And we know we can hasten these processes ... by additional means' (2.18).

By 'additional means' Swamiji means yoga. We have already discussed Swamiji's view that yoga is a process of speeding up evolution—yoga is spiritual revolution. Swamiji explains further:

Can we put a limit to the hastening? We cannot say how much a man can grow in one life. You have no reason to say that this much a man can do and no more. Circumstances can hasten him wonderfully. Can there be any limit then, till you come to perfection? So, what comes of it?—That a perfect man, that is to say, the type that is to come of this race, perhaps of millions of years hence, that man can come today. And this is what the Yogis say, that all great incarnations and prophets are such men; that they reached perfection in this one life (2.18–9).

Swamiji now applies his theory of speeding up spiritual evolution to the lives of the great incarnations and prophets, including Sri Ramakrishna. Referring to Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual attainments, Swamiji continues: 'We have had such men at all periods of the world's history and at all times. Quite recently, there was such a man who lived the life of the whole human race and reached the end—even in this life' (2.19).

In the light of the above explanation we can understand the significance of Sri Ramakrishna's transcendental experience of world prophets and their merging into his own being. Each avatara and prophet represents a state of transcendental consciousness—Sri Krishna represents Krishna-consciousness, Buddha represents Buddha-consciousness, Jesus represents Christ-consciousness, and so on. By realizing the earlier avataras and prophets Sri Ramakrishna passed through their states of consciousness as stages of the spiritual growth of his inner being and integrated them all into his own spiritual consciousness. Thereby he vastly enlarged and enriched his own spiritual knowledge and power.

He did not, however, stop with this accomplishment. He went further and attained an integral state of consciousness that was more advanced than the states of consciousness attained by all previous prophets. It was for this reason that Swami Vivekananda spoke of Sri Ramakrishna as the culmination of 'five thousand years of national spiritual life', and described him as *avatāra variṣṭha*, the best of the avataras.

Each of the Hindu deities represents a particular manifestation of divine consciousness. By realizing these deities Sri Ramakrishna came to embody their states of divine consciousness. This is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped in the Ramakrishna movement as *sarva-deva-devī-svarūpa*, embodiment of all gods and goddesses. For this reason it is believed in the Ramakrishna movement that any deity or avatara can be worshipped through Sri Ramakrishna. He is like a gate that opens to many mansions of the supreme Divine.   🕉 PB

Notes and References

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21. More than fifty years ago J B S Haldane, the noted British scientist, wrote an article in which he pointed out the striking similarity of the Hindu concept of *dashavatara*, ten avataras, of Vishnu with the modern scientific concept of evolution of vertebrate animals—from the *matsya*, fish, through the *kurma*, reptile, to the *varaha*, mammal, and the emergence of man from the savage, *narasimha*, through the levels of hominid, hunter, farmer, and civilized man.
22. *Complete Works*, 2.18.

Indian Peafowl in Sanskrit Literature and Tradition

Dr Suruchi Pande

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

MAYURA WAS DEPICTED suggesting auspicious or inauspicious omens. Here are some examples. The *Agnipurana* says: 'While going out if the peafowl is seen at the left or in front, it shows good luck. While going for a pilgrimage if the calls of the peafowl are different, it shows that there will be a possibility of thieves.'[31] The *Brihatsamhita* (500–50 CE) says that if the surroundings have the colour of peafowl's neck, it augurs heavy rains.[32] The *Vasantarajashakunam* (tentatively medieval period) describes various types of consequences according to the different calls of a peacock heard.[33] The *Markandeya Purana* says: 'One who steals away leafy vegetables becomes a peacock (in his next birth).'[34]

The thirteenth century Hamsadeva, author of *Mrigapakshishastra*, describes six species of a peacock and names them *mayura*, *barhin*, *nilakantha*, *bhujangabhuk*, *shikhavala*, and *keki*.[35] There are no specific descriptions of these classifications, thus they are very general in character.

The following is a story from the Meghalaya folklore. The peacock, U-klew, was an ordinary grey-feathered bird but it was too proud and used to strut about majestically, showing off that his tuft was more erect than others'. His tail was also longer, which he carried more gracefully than other birds, but it being unwieldy he could not enter the homes of the lowly birds and as a consequence he always attended the courts of the big and wealthy birds, where he was well entertained. This added to his self-importance, making him haughty and overbearing. Being disliked by his neighbours, they jested at his expense. The birds used to flatter him, simply for the amusement of seeing him swell his breast and hear him boast. One day they told him that he had been selected by the birds to be their ambassador to the Blue Realm, where the beautiful maiden Ka-sngi ruled and poured her bright light so generously on their world. The peacock felt honoured and walked with an even bigger swagger while boasting of his coming visit. He conceived of a still more ambitious plan: to woo and win the royal maiden for his wife and live with her in the Blue Realm. The birds were all a twitter and enjoyed the fun. He was such a heavy-bodied bird and had never flown higher than a treetop; and to fly to the Blue Realm! How ridiculous he was making himself and how angry he would be when he found he had been duped. But much to everyone's surprise the peacock bade goodbye and launched himself. U-klew continued flying till he vanished out of sight. Strong on the wing, U-klew soared higher and higher till he reached the sky and alighted at the palace of Ka-sngi, the most beautiful and good maiden. Ka-sngi was destined to live alone in her grand palace and her heart often yearned for companionship. When she saw a stranger at her gates, she rejoiced and hastened to receive him with courtesy. Learning of his errand she became happier and thought, 'I shall never pine

for companionship again, for this noble bird will always live with me'.

U-klew left the earth and entered the realm of light and sunshine, but did not cast off his conceited nature. Rather, his selfishness and conceit grew more pronounced as his comforts and luxuries increased. Seeing the eager welcome by the beautiful maiden, he became more exacting, demanding all sorts of services from her and grew surly if she was not attending on him. Ka-sngi, on the other hand, was noble, generous, and delighted to render kindness to others. She loved to shine upon the world and see it responding to her warmth and attention; she waited upon him with unparalleled love and devotion, which he received with cold indifference as he considered it was due to his greatness rather than to the gracious and unselfish devotion of his consort.

Previously Ka-sngi's chief outlet of munificence was in shedding her warm rays upon the earth, but after U-klew came she became so absorbed in him that she was no longer able to leave her palace. Thus, the earth became cold and dreary and the birds became cheerless, their feathers drooped and songs ceased. U-slap, the rain, came and mercilessly pelted their cosy nests causing their young to die. U-lyoh, the mist, brought his dark clouds and hung them over the rice fields so that no grain ripened. Ka-eriong, the storm, shook the trees, destroying all the fruit, so the birds wandered about homeless and without food. In their great misery they sought the counsel of the humans, and by means of divinations the humans ascertained that these misfortunes were due to the presence of U-klew in the Blue Realm. There was no hope for prosperity until U-klew could be lured back to the jungles.

Acting on the advice of the humans, the birds invoked a cunning woman, whose name was Ka-sabuit, to make the peacock return from the Blue

Realm. Ka-sabuit was then destitute owing to the great famine. She had nothing to eat except some wild roots and no seed to sow in her garden except cheap mustard seeds—and even these she was afraid to sow lest hungry birds should devour it and leave her with nothing. After the birds had explained to her their troubles she agreed to bring U-klew back to earth within thirteen moons and on two conditions: that the birds should refrain from picking seeds from her garden and that they should torment the animals if they came to eat her crops or trample on it. The birds readily agreed to these simple terms.

Ka-sabuit's garden was in a clearing in the jungle and could be seen from the hilltops around. In the past the sun used to shine upon it from morning. Ka-sabuit wended her way to this clearing after meeting the birds and began to dig the ground with great care and patience, bestowing much more time upon it than she had ever been known to do. Her neighbours laughed and playfully asked her if she expected a crop of precious stones to grow from her mustard seed that year. But she took no heed. She worked on patiently while the birds waited and watched. She shaped her mustard bed like the form of a woman, inviting thus the mirth of her neighbours. By and by the seeds sprouted and the plot of land shaped like a woman became covered with glistening green leaves. In time small yellow flowers appeared on the mustard plants, so that the plot of land shaped like a woman looked from a distance like a beautiful maiden wearing a mantle of gold. The neighbours saw it and stopped laughing full of wonder. The old lady still worked on patiently and kept her own counsel.

Up in the Blue Realm U-klew continued his despotic and arrogant ways, while his gentle and noble wife spared no pains to gratify his wishes. Like all pampered people the peacock

became fretful and more difficult to please, tiring of every diversion, and ever seeking some new source of indulgence, till at last nothing seemed to satisfy him. Even the magnificence of Ka-sngi's palace began to pall. Now and then memories of his old home and old associates came to disturb his mind. One day the peacock wandered forth from the palace precincts to view his old haunts. As he recognized one familiar landmark after another, his eyes were suddenly arrested by the sight of a lovely maiden dressed all in gold and lying asleep in a garden in the middle of the forest. At the sight of her his heart melted and he forgot all about Ka-sngi. After this U-klew was reluctant to remain in the Blue Realm and yearned for the maiden lying asleep on the earth. One day, to his wife's sorrow, he communicated his determination to return to earth. Ka-sngi became sorrowful and with all manners of inducement and persuasion and charm tried to prevail upon him to remain faithful to his marriage vows. But he was heartless and obdurate, and unmindful of all ties he departed. Ka-sngi followed him weeping and as she wept her tears wet his feathers transforming them into all the colours of the rainbow. Some of the larger tears falling on his long tail as he flew away were turned into brilliant-hued spots, which are called *ummat ka sngi*, sun's tears, by the Khasis to this day. Ka-sngi cried out saying that these spots would remind him of her, wherever he might be and on whomsoever his affections might be bestowed upon, and thus he would never be able to forget her.

U-klew came to the jungle and when the birds saw his beautiful feathers they greeted him with wonder and admiration. When he informed them that he had come in quest of a lovely maiden dressed in gold, they began to laugh, and it now became clear to them what had been the object of the cunning woman while shaping her mustard bed into a woman's form. They invited U-klew to come and be introduced to the object of his love and led him forth with great ceremony to the garden of Ka-sabuit. There he saw not a beautiful maiden as he had imagined, but a bed of common mustard cunningly shaped. His shame and humiliation were pitiful to behold. He tried to fly back to the Blue Realm, but he was no longer able to take that long flight. Uttering the most sad and plaintive cries he had to resign to the life of the jungle forever. Every morning, it is said, peacocks can be seen stretching their necks towards the sky and flapping their wings to greet the coming of Ka-sngi and their only happiness is to spread their lovely feathers to catch the sunbeams.[36]

Mayura *in Mythology*

There is an interesting story in the Valmiki Ramayana. Ravana once set out with his army of demons to gain victory over kings. In a country named Ushirabija, a king named Marutta was performing a sacrifice. Ravana alighted from his *pushpaka vimana*, aerial vehicle, and the various gods frightened of him took different disguises and fled in panic. Indra, king of the gods, assumed the form of a big peafowl. After Ravana left the place all the gods reassembled and Indra thanked the peacock. Feeling a special attachment to it, he said: 'Till now you were blue in colour. But from today onwards your feathers will have various colours. I transfer my thousand eyes to you. Besides, you'll be immune from all diseases. Whoever kills you, will meet with death. You'll dance at the commencement of the rainy season. You will be greeted by people with enthusiasm.'[37]

Since Puranic times the god Kartikeya—Skanda or popularly Murugan—is associated with the peafowl. Kartikeya is young, courageous, the commander-in-chief of gods' armies and its protector, and his vehicle is the peafowl. The bird is representative of beauty and bravery. Ancient Indians believed that from the peafowl one should learn fearlessness in battle, early rising, bonding with others, and protection of females.

One of the names of Ganesha, god of wisdom, is Mayureshwara. It is believed that the peafowl was his vehicle in the Treta Yuga. As the peafowl has the capacity to kill poisonous snakes, Ganesha is the symbol of one who can conquer *kalasarpa*, death in the form of a snake. The peafowl has a deep blue colour, which is the symbol of an evolved mind. There is also in Sanskrit the Mayuresha hymn, which glorifies Mayureshwara.

Even the Jains respect the peafowl, as they believe that it is the carrier of goddess Sarasvati. Sarasvati is the personification of all knowledge—arts, science, crafts, and skills—and her vehicle is a white swan, but the peacock is invariably associated with this goddess. Symbolically, the peafowl stands for this world and all its glory, but if one desires moksha, one has to transcend the world to obtain spiritual knowledge. Even today a symbolic expression of Sarasvati and her peafowl is drawn on stone slates or papers and worshipped by students on the day of the Hindu festival called Dussehra.

Sri Krishna is depicted as wearing an ornamental peafowl feather on his head. Here the feather is the symbol of Prakriti. The peacocks on seeing Sri Krishna started dancing, thinking he was a black cloud. Even today in Vrindavan nobody harms the many peafowl that roam about fearlessly due to the bird's association with Sri Krishna's boyhood days.

'INDIAN PEACOCK', JEAN / FLICKR

The Mayura *in Indian Art and Folklore*

Undated texts on Indian architecture, like the *Vishvakarma-vastushastra* (4.16), mention the carvings of peafowl for the beautification of buildings. Traditionally, Vishvakarma is believed to be the architect, engineer, and sculptor of the gods. *Natyashastra* of Bharata—a treatise on dance, drama, and music written during the second or third century CE—describes the *mudra*, finger posture, that is adopted from the peafowl. The *Abhinaya Darpana* (twelfth century CE) of Nandikeshvara narrates of a *mayura-gati*, peafowl-step, in dance. The Sanskrit text *Sangita-ratnakara* (1200–50 CE) mentions various sources of musical notes, and it is said that the *shadaj* notes of music were adopted from the calls of a peafowl.[38]

A popular saying relates that God created the world in three days, but he took three days to create the peafowl! Jain monks and Muslim fakirs carry a peafowl feather fan to ward off evil spirits. In the Bhilla tribal community of India there is a sect named Mayuri, which means peahen. The peafowl is their deity; they protect and worship it during auspicious festivals. They have a dance style termed *mornach*, peafowl dance, which is performed by girls, and a game named after the peafowl. A folk dance in Goa, performed by men during the Shigmo festival in the month of February-March, is called *moruleum*; the dancers wear peafowl masks and with feathers in their headgear go around the village singing.

Forty miles from Pune, in the Morgaon village of Maharashtra, there is a temple dedicated to Mayureshwara. The place is traditionally believed to be shaped like a peafowl and in its compound there is a large number of peafowl.

Another village in Maharashtra is called Morachi Chincholi, Chincholi of the peafowl. The villagers have been protecting the peafowl for the last four hundred years, as the bird is the vehicle of Khandoba, the local deity. An alarm-

Mayura mudra

ing decline in peafowl occurred in 2002–4 due to a severe drought. Help came in the form of a survey by the ELA Foundation, Pune, and the Forest Department in April 2006. The number of birds is now slowly increasing. ❧

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Human Development: Translating Vivekananda's Ideas into Numbers

Prof. Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee

(Continued from the previous issue)

FOR DETERMINING the *W* index we have to adopt a roundabout procedure and impose a number of simplifying assumptions. From the official publications of agencies like the World Bank and the UNDP we can procure, for most countries of the world, the proportion of people who are above the international poverty line as represented by a daily income of PPP US$ 1 at 1985 prices. We suppose these 'non-poor' people are able to secure adequate nutrition, shelter, work-opportunity, and other facilities. We then use the life tables[13] for different countries, published by the WHO, to split the non-poor population of a country into groups corresponding to age-ranges representing preschool years, primary and secondary school-going years, and adulthood. After this we make use of the same life tables and official educational statistics to find for the entire population the proportion of people who belong to each of these groups and, at the same time, enjoy adequate health care so as to have the prospect of living up to the age of sixty-five, and the opportunity for education so as to be able to enrol in a school or, in the case of adults, to have become literate. Pooling together these percentages would give us the proportion of people who have had adequate outer growth. To obtain the *W* index we scale down this proportion by an adjustment factor representing the level of personal autonomy and security in the country. For this we make use of the scores given to different countries by the well-known non-profit institution Freedom House.[14]

To determine the inner growth index *I* we recall the six traits described at the end of the section on holistic collective development, which together form concomitants of a high level of inner growth. To quantify inner growth our strategy would be to represent these six traits in terms of numerical indices and then to combine these into a single index in such a way that the composite index is high if, and only if, *all* the trait indices have high values. Because of the abstract qualitative character of the traits, to represent these by numerical indices looks, at first sight, like an impossible proposition. However, it is possible to construct such indices meaningfully by selecting for each trait a set of suitable secondary variables that seem to be palpably affected by it—in the positive or negative direction—and studying the pattern of their joint variation over a large number of countries. We give, as far as possible, the flavour of the technique in non-technical terms with reference to the trait 'spirit of oneness'.

Since we will have to study how a number of selected variables vary together over different countries, the first step is to select a suitably large set of countries for which the values of the variables are available. The *Human Development Report* 2007/2008 of the UNDP gives the values of the HDI for 177 countries. Out of these, we select a subset of 54 countries.[15] The countries

selected, with the exception of Sweden, are those for which the population in 2005 exceeded 15 million and for which adequate data are available—Sweden is included because of its generally accepted high level of human development. The next task is to identify a number of variables in a society whose values should increase, or decrease, as the level of the trait 'spirit of oneness' rises. Intuitively, it seems plausible that this trait would manifest through the people's sympathy for others and concern for the welfare of society as a whole. Keeping this in mind we identify the following six variables as being affected by the trait:

(a) Number of intentional homicides in a year relative to the size of the population (–).

(b) Number of internally displaced persons and outgoing refugees relative to the size of the population (–).

(c) Percentage of total bank loans that are non-performing (–).

(d) An appropriate index representing absence of corruption (+).

(e) Percentage of voter turnout in country-wide elections (+).

(f) An appropriate index representing the standard of governance and rule of law (+).

The first three variables affect the trait negatively, while the last three do so positively. Of course, many other variables affected by the trait—such as the relative number of suicides, divorces, or membership of cooperatives—can be included. We have selected the above set of six variables as their values are easily available for the countries in our sample. There is nothing sacrosanct about the set of variables selected for the above or any of the remaining five traits. The sets can always be enlarged subject to data availability.

If the trait affects the variables marked by (+) positively and those marked by (–) nega-

tively, the variables marked by the same sign would be positively associated, in the sense that they would tend to move together—that is, for a given country they would all tend to have similar values, large or small—and variables marked by dissimilar signs would be negatively associated, in the sense that they would tend to move in opposite directions. We may not know the 'values' of a trait, but we know the values of the variables for different countries. Studying the association pattern of the latter, as reflected in their joint variability, we can have some idea about how the former varies over the countries. In fact, if we assume that the trait appears as an additive component with a suitable coefficient in each of the variables and largely causes the association pattern of the set of variables, then, by an appropriate statistical technique,[16] it is possible to extract from the values of the variables a numerical index—or sometimes a pair of numerical indices—that explains a substantial part of their association pattern and can plausibly be taken as representing the trait. By standardizing the index suitably we can ensure that it varies between 0 and 100, and increases with the level of the trait.

The above technique can be applied in the case of each of the traits, using of course in each case the corresponding set of variables. To give an idea of the complexities involved in the selection of variables we offer a list of nine variables for another trait: 'breadth of awareness'.

(a) Adjusted net savings as a percentage of GNI.

(b) Measure of substitution of non-renewable means of energy by renewable means from 1990 to 2005.

(c) Measure of success in controlling total CO_2 emissions between 1990 and 2004.

(d) Measure of afforestation between 1990 and 2005.

(e) Per cent change in ecological footprint per person from 1975 to 2003.[17]

(f) An appropriate index of environmental performance.

(g) Number of Internet users relative to the size of the population adjusted for the level of economic development of the country as measured by GDP per capita.

(h) An index measuring the country's status in clearing its dues to the UN.

(i) Value of core cultural goods imported as percentage of the total value of all imports.

Applying the technique outlined earlier we find indices representing traits (1) to (6). It turns out that the association pattern of the relevant variables can be explained satisfactorily by a single index for all but trait (6), for which we require two indices. A closer examination of trait (6), 'breadth of awareness', suggests that it requires two indices because it really has two dimensions: one temporal and the other global. People of a given country may be concerned about the material welfare of the next generation of their own country; for this, they may prefer more industrialization and capital formation without bothering about the bearing such a policy has on issues like global warming or ecological damage. On the other hand, to the extent they are conscious about the health of the planet as a whole, they would use renewable and non-polluting energy sources and try to control the levels of CO_2 emission. In all, we obtain seven trait indices. We combine these into a composite index by taking their second order harmonic mean. This ensures that the composite index is high for a country if, and only if, it has high values for *all* trait indices. We present in Table 1 the computed values of W and I, as also the values of the UNDP's HDI—denoted by H—for 15 of the 54 countries for which these values have been worked out.

Table 1: Well-conditioning Index (W), Inner Growth Index (I), and UNDP'S HDI (H) for 15 selected countries

	W	I	H
Australia	75.86	65.81	96.20
Brazil	50.07	52.13	80.00
Canada	78.44	66.93	96.10
China	40.08	41.91	77.70
Germany	7.27	63.64	93.50
Ghana	16.52	47.86	55.30
India	24.40	44.91	61.90
Japan	69.98	62.13	95.30
Pakistan	21.68	32.19	55.10
Russian Federation	42.72	47.84	80.20
Saudi Arabia	40.73	37.56	81.20
Sweden	85.47	70.07	95.60
Uganda	4.62	42.55	50.50
UK	75.63	68.64	94.60
US	69.48	61.48	95.10

An examination of the values for all the 54 countries shows that there is a close association between the indices H and W. On the other hand, when the effect of W is eliminated there is practically no association between I and H. These statements may be confirmed statistically.[18] This shows that the UNDP's HDI broadly indicates the level of basic outer growth of the people of a country but fails to reflect their level of inner growth.

As regards the relative position of different countries as reflected through the actual values of the pair of indices (W, I) we see that Sweden (85.47, 70.07) scores very high in terms of both well-conditioning and inner growth;

UK (75.63, 68.64), Canada (78.44, 66.93), and Australia (75.86, 65.81) also have a high standing, whereas Japan (69.98, 62.13) and the US (69.48, 61.48) occupy somewhat lower positions on both counts. China (40.08, 41.91) is way ahead of India (24.40, 44.91) in terms of *W*, but falls a little behind in terms of *I*. Remarkably, countries like Ghana (16.52, 47.86) and Uganda (4.62, 42.55), which have very low *W*, score decidedly better than Saudi Arabia (40.73, 37.56) in terms of *I*.

Conclusion

In the preceding section we have constructed indices of collective development by using data on what may be called post hoc or output variables. Consequent to the development being realized in a society the values of these variables would show up in particular ways—be they high or low. However, Swami Vivekananda not only described what characterizes collective development but clearly stated what should be done to realize such development in practice. Reading through the pages of his *Complete Works* we see that at various places he discussed a number of 'determinants' for collective development. Among these the foremost are dissemination of the ideal of oneness and divinity of all, spread of true education, encouragement of productive activity, redistribution of national product, participatory democracy, and promotion of give-and-take among nations.[19] It is possible to identify, for any country, many ante hoc or input variables—that have bearing on one or other of the above determinants of collective development and whose values are available in the official statistical literature. To name a few we can consider indicators representing commitment to international conventions on elimination of racial discrimination and discrimination against women, percentage of GDP representing pub-

lic expenditure on education, ratio of number of pupils to number of teachers, percentage of population using improved water sources, percentage of population having access to electricity, numbers of physicians and hospital beds relative to population, and tax levied as percentage of GDP. Across different countries we can examine how far these ante hoc variables are related to the indices *W* and *I* of development based on post hoc variables. A statistical study investigating this has been made for all the 54 countries that were selected. It has been found that the indices of development are strongly correlated with suitable sets of ante hoc variables. As the ante hoc variables are quite different in character from the post hoc variables used in index construction, these findings in a sense confirm the validity of the approach followed in quantifying development.   ॐ

Notes and References

13. The life table of a country gives the structure and survival probabilities of the idealized population that would come into existence if the prevalent mortalities could be maintained for an indefinitely long time.
14. See *Freedom in the World* (Washington DC: Freedom House, 2007).
15. In this article we present indices for only 15 countries. The data of all the 54 countries are available in *Human Development and its Quantification: A Holistic Approach*.
16. The technique used is called Principal Component Analysis and is based on the correlation matrix.
17. The ecological footprint per person measures the amount of land and water area required respectively to produce the resources and absorb the waste an individual consumes and generates.
18. For details see *Human Development and its Quantification: A Holistic Approach*.
19. See *Complete Works*, 2.85; 3.267; 4.284, 441, 464, 482–3; 5.253; 6.462; 7.183, 246.

REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** *copies of their latest publications*

Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, and the Art of the Self
Anne Carolyn Klein

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007. Website: *www.mlbd.com*. 2009. xviii + 307 pp. ₹ 295.

It was not without some trepidation that I began reading this book, whose subtitle pulled me up. After all, Buddhism does not give the highest place of existence for women. The Tibetan language uses 'skyes dman' for a woman, which means 'low born'. Naturally, this 'inferior species' cannot become the Buddha straightaway. A woman will have to undergo births to become a man and then only become qualified to reach Buddhahood. So, would *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen* be a feminist tract? The puzzlement continued till I came to page 15, where I met the Great Bliss Queen, and the rest of the journey became fairly smooth—though this is not a book for a reader without time to pause after each paragraph and reflect on its connectivity with what went earlier.

How much of a person's religion is received from tradition, and how much of it is personal experience? The percentage may vary, but the union of the two remains the basis for movements like religion and feminism. Anne's attempt to relate two movements, Buddhism and feminism, for reaching the meaning of ordered living takes us to the legend of the Great Bliss Queen.

Yeshey Tsogyel was born under wondrous circumstances and was certainly considered unique. She was being forcibly carried away by a prince much against her wishes when she escaped under Buddha's protection. She was then married to the emperor Tri-songday-tsen, who had invited Padmasambhava from India to help him in spreading Buddhism. The emperor seems to have given away Tsogyel to the Buddhist preacher as his consort. This was as well, for Padmasambhava was spreading Tantric Buddhism along with his other wife.

Tsogyel came to be known as the Great Bliss Queen, who is identified with Saraswati and Tara. Seen as a manifestation of wisdom and compassion, she 'is Vajravarahi (the Adamantine Sow) whose magnificence is not accessible to ordinary folks'. Anne embarks on a journey to connect this goddess of common folk in Tibet with modern feminism. With a little patience in tying up comparatist ideas, the connection becomes clearer. In a religious culture that is male-centred Tsogyel's presence as a helix of 'intellectual and experiential elements' fires Anne's imagination. Her personal knowledge of Tibet reveals the presence of women in religion as nuns or tantrikas—religious practitioners not vowed to celibacy. We also get to know of Tibetans' social life, which included the custom of polyandry.

In a book of this kind we have to come to terms with 'self'. Is the 'self' independent by itself, untouched by the form, male or female? When we meditate, 're-member the self', do we not get outside our physical forms? Anne moves around in Theravada Buddhism to draw our attention to 'the innate awareness of the Great Completeness'. Since hers is a comparative study, Anne keeps the backdrop constant: 'The paradigm of struggle against self is well known in religious and secular practice. For women the struggle for self-knowledge is all the more difficult in a male-centred world that is more than willing to tell her who she is or should be.'

Would it be possible to gain some light for modern feminism from the ritual of the Great Bliss Queen? It is a tantric ritual that combines sound, luminous image-patterns that rise in the mind—without clouding the clarity of the practitioner's mind—and the Mandala representing the Great Bliss Queen, like the Srichakra. We see in

it her Flaming Wisdom, the Holder of Awareness. There is a merging of one's thought and action in the sound and luminosity that streams from the ritual. The Western woman cannot easily understand the pure subjectivity that the ritual generates. She cannot move away from her selfhood, her personal story. Anne feels that in this matter the West would stand to gain by drawing strength from such spiritual practices.

'Yeshey Tsogyel herself is associated with an extensive narrative, and at the same time she has a dimension of subjectivity that is not simply the product, container, or display of that narrative. In her ritual context she is not a mask; she is not a role model. She is an expression of one's own capacity and potential. To meet her in this way means, for Western women, to possess and come to terms with their own story. It is also to recognize that, however fine or tragic our stories are, they cannot define us completely. There are other dimensions of embodied subjective experience' (193).

Well-endowed with notes, glossary, a sumptuous bibliography, and an index, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen* expands our mental horizons providing a rare intellectual meditation.

Prema Nandakumar
Researcher and Literary Critic,
Srirangam
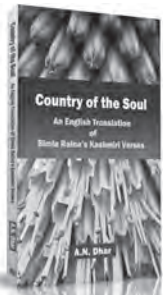
Country of the Soul:
An English Translation of
Bimla Raina's Kashmiri Verses
A N Dhar

Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 7/22, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi 110 002. Website: *www.atlanticbooks.com*. 2009. xiv + 89 pp. ₹ 150.

This elegantly produced volume is in many ways an invaluable addition to the genre of mystical poetry. You may dip into any poem and you are struck by its simplicity and depth. This is poetry existing in its own right, and even if you have no information about the author, you can straightaway see that this is creativity, the culmination of which is spiritual experience.

Professor Dhar, who has translated with remarkable inwardness and ease, tells that with the publication of the two volumes of her Kashmiri verses, Bimla Raina 'established her reputation as an outstanding woman poet, and is held in esteem by the Kashmiri intelligentsia living in the country and elsewhere abroad'. This is, as Professor Dhar says, all the more intriguing since Bimla Raina had 'formal education only up to the matriculation standard'. But she absorbed the structural form of Lal Ded—the most celebrated of Kashmiri mystical poets—which is enriched by the impact of Sufi poetry and the spiritual ambience it exemplifies.

Mystical poetry is built on the insistent need to communicate and share one's joy allied with the awareness of the futility of words. Says Raina:

> When the word takes root,
> Truth prevails,
> falsehood can't stand
> and death withdraws;
> the fountain sprouts
> and the sea roars;
> then we hear a rhythmic beat.

The rhythmic beat is as much a mystical experience as, in a sense, the metrical form Bimla Raina chose: the *vakh*s, perfected by Lal Ded. The quatrain in the original evokes, one can be sure, the symbolic suggestivity of the images in the poem. Piling up images is tiresome, but when arranged to reflect interconnectedness intuited in the interior being, they suggest the experience:

> God will sell you grace
> in return for the love you offer;
> be single-thoughted
> and buy the loved one you seek,
> remaining tight-lipped
> about the transaction.

For something which transcends all calculation, 'transaction' is apparently a startling description. But it is precisely because of this very 'yoking' of apparently incongruous motifs that the poem becomes a poem and not a prosaic idea. Perhaps there are also risks here: this level can be sporadic, not a regular beat. For instance, in her description of yogic practices—based on obvious Kashmir Shaivism—there is accurate detail but little aesthetic thrust (poem 76).

This is, however, rare. And *Country of the Soul* is an indispensable volume for all those who are lovers of poetry as also the poetry of love as spiritual. The translation is impeccable, elegant, and above all free from that dull literal rendering that makes such translations unreadable.

Dr M Sivaramkrishna
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Osmania University

Hinduism: Triumphs and Tribulations
S K Kulkarni

Indus Source Books, PO Box 6194, Malabar Hill PO, Mumbai 400 006. Website: *www.indussource.com*. 2008. xxxii + 319. ₹ 299.

The author, who once worked in the Indian Audit and Account Services, has attempted a historical study of Hinduism from ancient to modern times. Its legal-like arguments are supported by several quotations from various authors. The book comprises five chapters: 'Origin and Evolution', 'Casteism and Untouchability', 'Idol Worship', 'Religious Conversions', and 'Secularism'. He rightly states that the term Hinduism, which emerged in the nineteenth century, is a misnomer for the expression 'Sanatana Dharma'. He highlights many of the negative aspects of Hindu society that developed throughout history. These arose for various reasons, and he considers Islam and Christianity as its main opponents. This includes the idea of secularism, which, he says, has been used to destroy its basic tenets and values. He concludes that minorities in India should join this interpretation of Hindu mainstream. While citing Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, and Christianity and their impact on Hindu society and religion he refers to Dayananda Saraswati, Ram Mohan Roy, and other reformers who have tried to restore somewhat Hinduism's ancient glory.

It is common today to link religion and politics, especially when terms like Hindu and Hinduism are manipulated. Many times these terms are used to suggest a monolithic Hindu religion and society. But Sanatana Dharma is not an 'ism'. The idea of 'the One and the many' is an intrinsic aspect of the universality of Indian civilization. This is what has allowed it to persist for several millennia. In this context the author barely mentions the contribution made by Sri Ramakrishna, who reminded us of the compatibility of all religious viewpoints, recognizing truth wherever it was to be found, without confusing it with political ups and downs.

The motive of all invaders and rulers—be they Christians, Muslims, Jains, or Hindus—has been greed for power and wealth. Take the case of Ashoka's genocide committed during the Kalinga War; yet, in this case, his religion is not cited. Therefore, any religio-historical study is complex and requires multiple levels of understanding. Another example: Shivaji had under him Muslim soldiers who fought for him, and Muslim rulers had Hindu soldiers under them. Political ambitions use religion as an excuse and this is what is causing a disruption in the Indian psyche today. Fortunately, the ordinary Indian of all faiths rejects such assumptions. The average Indian still prefers the syncretic approach as exemplified by Sri Ramakrishna. The author fails to mention Dara Shikoh and other such Muslim leaders, especially Sufi saints, who have advocated a syncretic approach for understanding the inclusive nature of Indian civilization.

Prof. S C Malik
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University Grants Commission, New Delhi

Teachers are Sculptors
J P Vaswani

Sterling Publishers, A-59 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-II, New Delhi 110 020. Website: *sterlingpublihsers.com*. 2008. 110 pp. ₹ 100.

Most of us have pleasant and nostalgic memories of teachers who influenced us more by character than by scolding and sermonizing. This book is about such ideal teachers. It addresses an aspect largely ignored by our present education system: the role of teachers in moulding students' character to make better humans and citizens. The author exhorts teachers to stop grumbling about the system and become agents of change and renewal. He asks teachers to be aware of their infinite potential and the positive role they can

play as transmitters of values and ideals to future generations. 'You need to cultivate greater self-esteem and self-respect. You need to have greater faith in yourself and in the nobility of your profession,' exhorts Dada Vaswani.

As the true teacher he is, the author elaborates the diverse roles and responsibilities of a teacher through apt analogies and jokes, which make reading this book a pleasant experience. The illustrated book also abounds with plenty of wise counsel like engaging students constructively, dealing with problem children, handling stress, and so on.

The quotations attributed to Mahatma Gandhi on page 19 and 96 are, in fact, statements made by Swami Vivekananda. The error needs to be corrected in the next edition.

This book, coming at a time when there is a serious erosion of values in the teaching area, is recommended for all connected with the teaching profession.

Swami Vedapurushananda
Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia.
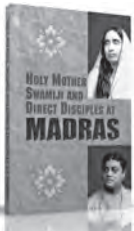
Holy Mother, Swamiji, and Direct Disciples at Madras

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. Website: *www.chennaimath.org*. 2010. vi + 281 pp. ₹ 50.

'Young men of Madras, my hope is in you. Will you respond to the call of the nation?' Swami Vivekananda exhorted the youth of Chennai—former Madras—and they admirably responded. Supporting the swami's travel to the West, they gave a grand reception on his return and built one of the first centres of the Ramakrishna Order. This response continues as it became evident by the city's enthusiastic celebrations of the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's return from the West in 1997 and the 150th birth anniversary of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in 2003.

The book under review is a compilation of various accounts of the stay of Sri Sarada Devi, and Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda, Shivananda, Ramakrishnananda, Abhedananda, Vijnanananda, Subodhananda, Niranjanananda, Turiyananda, Trigunatitananda, and Premananda

in the city. Chennai and its people are inseparably linked to the Ramakrishna movement. Marina Beach, Parthasarathy Temple, Kapalishwara Temple, Mylapore, Triplicane, and various other places in the city have been hallowed by the visits of these spiritual luminaries.

Meticulously referenced, this volume contains many valuable photographs and interesting lesser-known facts—like Swami Subodhananda learning Tamil. A tribute to the spirit of Chennai in spearheading the cause of the Ramakrishna movement, it could well be a prized possession of all the admirers of the movement and the city.

Swami Narasimhananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

BOOKS RECEIVED

Nine Steps to Realize God
B S Patil

Mrs S B Patil, 'Saish', 120 National Society, Pune 411 007. 2010. xii + 143 pp. ₹ 160.

The book shows in a few steps how to tap the fountain of spiritual wealth and live a successful and happy life.

Great Sayings with Illustrations

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. Website: *www.sriramakrishna.org*. 2009. 106 pp. ₹ 20.

This handy hardcover pocket booklet presents the sublime sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda intermingled with their many pictures.

Fragrance of Sai Bhakti
Suresh Chandra Gupta

Shri Sai Samiti Noida, 64-D/2, F Block, Sector 40, Noida 201 303. Website: *saimandirsec4onoida.org*. 2010. xii + 139 pp. ₹ 70.

For devotees of Shri Shirdi Sai Baba, this book is fragrant with deep devotion, veneration, and longing for Sai Baba and his grace.

REPORTS

Office block for Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary celebrations

Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna

The 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated with different programmes by the following centres. **Belur Math**: symposium and drama on 9 March 2011; **Baranagar Math**: devotees' convention, public meeting, and cultural programmes from 4 to 6 March; **Delhi**: public meeting, presided by Dr Karan Singh, and a musical performance on 6 March; **Jammu**: publication of *Sri Ramakrishna ke Ikwal-e-Zarin*—an Urdu translation of the abridged version of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*—released by Sri N N Vohra, governor of Jammu and Kashmir, on 9 March; **Kamarpukur**: religious discourses, devotional songs, cultural programmes, and an exhibition from 6 to 10 March; **Kankurgachhi**: *japa-yajna*, devotees' convention, and public meeting on 26 and 27 March; **Nagpur**: spiritual retreat from 11 to 13 March; **Rahara**: parliament of religions, devotees' convention, procession, and cultural programmes from 3 to 8 March.

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

On 23 March, the birthday of Swami Yogananda, Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a newly constructed office building near the headquarters office at **Belur Math** to be used for Swami Vivekananda's 150th birth anniversary celebrations.

The following centres organized various programmes to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. **Agartala**: state level seminar on 'Religious Harmony' on 19 and 20 March, inaugurated by Sri Shyamal Kumar Sen, former governor of West Bengal; **Chennai Math**: publishing of 40 e-books optimized for mobile phones, e-book readers, and computers and launching the mobile edition of *Vedanta Kesari* enabling readers to download and read the magazine on their mobile devices; **Limbdi**: talks on Swamiji's ideas on education at various schools; **Port Blair**: devotees' conference on 27 March; **Pune**: state level seminar on 'In Search of Religious Harmony' on 12 and 13 March; **Puri Math**: speeches and cultural programmes from 26 to 28 February; **Vadodara**: state level seminar on 'Interfaith Harmony for a Global Civilization' on 27 March, inaugurated by Sri P N Bhagwati, former chief justice of India.

The progress of the main service projects under the Central Executive Committee 'A' is as follows: Of a target of 150 units Gadadhar Abhyudaya Prakalpa (physical, mental, and spiritual development of children) has undertaken 123 units and Vivekananda Swasthya Parisheva Prakalpa (preventive and curative medical care to children) 74 units; Sarada Palli Vikas Prakalpa (welfare, education, and empowerment of women) covered 3 villages of a target of 10, and Akhandananda Seva Prakalpa (service to

marginalized people) undertook 4 pockets of poverty out of proposed 10.

News from Branch Centres

On 5 February **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, **Narainpur**, held a Kisan Mela, farmers' fair, in which more than 10,000 farmers participated.

On 18 February Sri Sudesh Mahto, deputy chief minister of Jharkhand, inaugurated the gravity irrigation system set up by **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, **Ranchi Morabadi**, at Silli Block in Ranchi district. With this system about 100 families are now getting water round the clock.

At **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama**, **Belgaum**, Sri L K Advani, former deputy prime minister of India, inaugurated an auditorium on 4 February, and Revered Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, consecrated the newly built *gopuram*s, domes, of the temple on 5 February. Revered Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Dr Abdul Kalam, former president of India, Sri L K Advani, and several other dignitaries addressed the public

meetings, youth convention, and devotees' conference. Many monks and devotees attended the four-day programme from 4 to 7 February.

Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, **Chapra**, has shifted its shrine from the ground floor to the first floor of the ashrama building. On 18 February, the birthday of Swami Adbhutananda, Swami Prabhananda consecrated the shrine at its new location and also declared open the new multipurpose hall. Besides, the monks' quarters and the staff quarters were inaugurated on 17 February. Public meetings and a youth convention were organized from 18 to 20 February. Many devotees and 104 monastics attended the programme.

In addition to the already existing Jnanavahini mobile bus bookstall, **Ramakrishna Math**, **Hyderabad**, has launched six Jagruti mobile auto custom-built bookstalls to go regularly to various parts of Andhra Pradesh and spread the message of the Holy Trio. Besides, the centre has set up 14 bookstalls in the temple precincts of important pilgrimage places like Tirumala, Srisailam, Annavaram, and Kalahasti.

On 3 March Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj released at Belur Math a documentary *Belur Math: The Heart of Ramakrishna Movement* brought out by **Advaita Ashrama**, **Kolkata**.

Swami Prabhananda inaugurated the newly built primary school building and the first floor of the Pallimangal building at **Ramakrishna Mission**, **Kamarpukur**, on 4 March.

On 11 March Revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the newly constructed building at Samaj Sevak Shikshana Mandir, an institution of **Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha**, **Belur**, comprising among other things classrooms, laboratories, offices, and residential rooms.

In a function held on 13 March **Ramakrishna Math**, **Chennai**, presented the Vivekananda Vidya Prashasti Award, comprising a citation and a sum of 1 lakh rupees to Sri P S Mani, renowned

Tamil writer who has authored a number of books on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna Math, **Bangalore**, organized a programme from 24 to 27 March to mark the centenary of Holy Mother's visit to Bangalore. It was inaugurated by Sri M N Venkatachaliah, former chief justice of India. The programme included ceremonially receiving Holy Mother at Bangalore Cantonment Railway Station, special worship on the Holy Mother Rock, and a public meeting at Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple, which the Holy Mother had visited.

Relief

Disturbance Relief · **Cherrapunjee** centre continued relief operations among people affected by recent social disturbances in East Garo Hills district, Meghalaya. The centre distributed the following items to 915 affected families of 19 villages in Williamnagar and Resubelpara subdivisions of the district from 23 to 25 March: 9,912 kg rice, 938 bags, 930 pvc sheets, 1,350 kg GI wire, 478 kg MF yarn (rope), 5,120 bamboos, and 915 sets of utensils (each set containing 1 plate, 1 bowl, 1 tumbler, 1 ladle, and 1 bucket).

Fire Relief · **Silchar** centre distributed 95 saris, an equal number of dhotis, mosquito nets, steel plates and tumblers, and 250 packets of biscuits to 95 families whose houses were ravaged by a devastating fire in a slum near Silchar railway station on 28 March.

Distress Relief · The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Agartala**: 511 saris, 69 dhotis, 317 sets children's garments; **Bangalore**: 125 saris; **Bhubaneswar**: 2,500 kg flour, 500 kg oil, 560 saris, 8 school uniforms, 380 school bags, 1,250 school books, 380 value education books, 760 notebooks, 380 geometry boxes, 760 pens, 760 pencils; **Cherrapunjee**: 554 garments; **Garbeta**: 140 saris; **Kamarpukur**: 150 saris, 75 frocks; **Nagpur**: 100 saris, 8 dhotis, 11 pajamas, 18 pants, 37 T-shirts, toiletries, and other items; **Puri Mission**: 1,000 saris; **Ramharipur**: 1,500 saris, 500 dhotis, 1,000 sets of children's garments; **Sargachhi**: 1,675 saris, 25 arsenic water

Centenary celebration of Holy Mother's visit to Bangalore

filters; **Thrissur**: 283 school uniforms.

Winter Relief · 14,132 blankets were distributed to the needy through the following centres: **Agartala**: 250; **Antpur**: 500; **Asansol**: 903; **Bankura**: 204; **Bhubaneswar**: 874; **Cherrapunjee**: 2,600; **Deoghar**: 1,000; **Ghatshila**: 53; **Jamshedpur**: 26; **Jayrambati**: 1,500; **Kanpur**: 6; **Khetri**: 298; **Malda**: 900; **Narendrapur**: 500; **Purulia**: 700; **Ramharipur**: 1,500; **Ranchi Morabadi**: 513; **Sargachhi**: 355; **Swami Vivekananda's Ancestral House, Kolkata**: 750, **Taki**: 200, **Tamluk**: 250, **Vrindaban**: 250. **Bhubaneswar** centre also distributed 66 sweaters to needy people. ⌘